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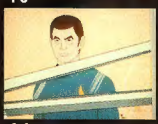
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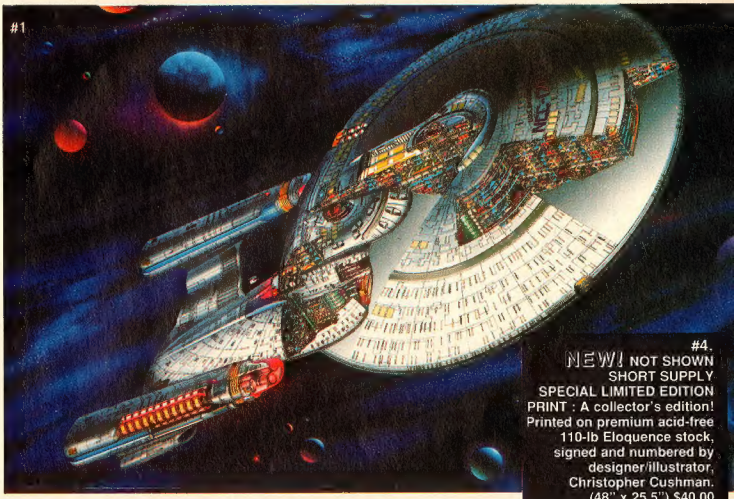


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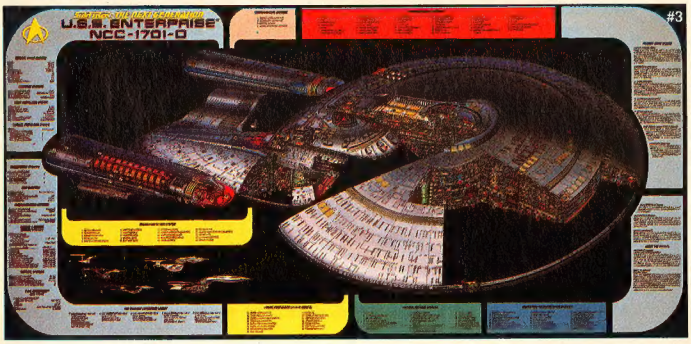


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Inside the Comics Scene


6 **THE SHADOW'S SHADOW**
Walter B. Gibson breathed life into a voice in the dark.

12 **EYES OF THE SHADOW**
Finally, the Master of Darkness comes to the silver screen.

15 **A MAN CALLED FLINTSTONE**
Henry Corden now speaks for the cartoon caveman.

20 **THE FIRST FRED**
But, Alan Reed initially shouted "Yabba-dabba-do!"

21 **SPEAKING OF WILMA**
Jean VanderPyl has always been Mrs. Flintstone.

25 **BETTY, BETTY!**
Bea Benaderet & others portrayed the Rubble woman.

26 **SOUL OF THE CLASSIC CARTOON**
The late Mel Blanc was a man of a thousand voices.

28 **THE OTHER BARNEYS**
Among others, Frank Welker offered a bit of Rubble talk.

31 **STILL WORTHLESS COMICS**
Are they really worth the paper they're printed on?

37 **WETWORKS & DRY**
Liquid uniforms mask Whilce Portacio's super-team.

41 **OK, IS THE PUNISHER OVER-WORKED?**
He does have the time to team with Batman.

45 **WHEN RIVERDALE RUNS RED**
And then, the Punisher targets Archie.

49 **FRATERNITY OF THE BONE**
Jeff Smith referees the Great Cow Race.

55 **BRANDON LEE SPEAKS**
In his last interview, he talks of life, death & "The Crow."

64 **THE UNMAKING OF "IRON MAN"**
Stuart Gordon really wanted to make this movie.

67 **RADIO HEROES**
The Fantastic Four saw action on the airwaves.

76 **BAT BADDIES**
Catwoman & Two-Face perfect animated evil.

78 **PREHISTORIC POSTCARDS**
That stone-age family wishes you were here.

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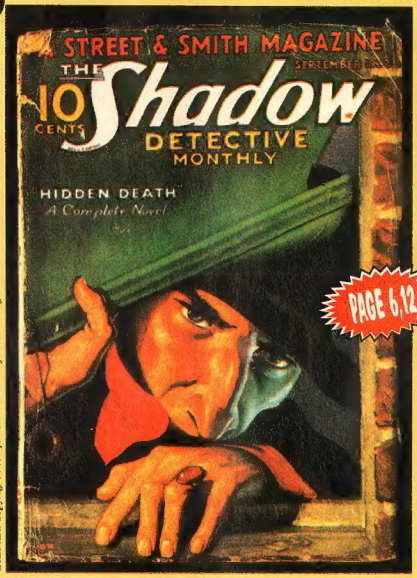


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# THE SHADOW'S SHADOW

***Walter B. Gibson, the writer who created the pulps' greatest hero, looked back at The Shadows of yesteryear.***

By WILL MURRAY

I don't know of anybody who wrote more about one character and who was so completely ignored when people began to do something with it," complained Walter B. Gibson, creator of The Shadow. "It's the most incongruous thing you could imagine."

Gibson was frequently in touch with COMICS SCENE about Universal Studios' *The Shadow* (a project that the studio began in 1980) until his death in December 1985 at age 88. And he was *not* happy.

"They've just been acting like a bunch of damned fools, that's all," Gibson said, his throaty voice shaking. "They've been going on options and options and options and nothing's happening with it."

Since 1980, the Universal project had struggled along. A script by Leslie (*Superman*) Newman went through several rewrites before being abandoned. A subsequent script was written by Howard Franklin. Over the years, directors somehow connected with the project included Robert Zemeckis, Richard Donner, Joe Dante, Tom Holland and Michael (*Mobsters*) Karbelnikoff. Potential Shadows included John Travolta, Al Pacino, Jeremy Irons and Daniel Day-Lewis. At times, it seemed as if *The Shadow* would never get off the ground. Then finally, eight years after Gibson's

Photo: Will Murray

**More than a half-century ago Walter B. Gibson (right) fashioned a myth called The Shadow. That's pulp fan Geoffrey Wynkoop behind the cloak.**

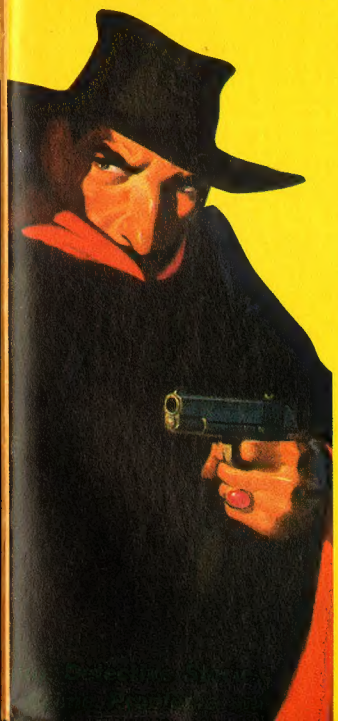
**Conjuring up a pen name wasn't much of a struggle. Gibson combined two magic dealers' monikers to create "Maxwell Grant."**

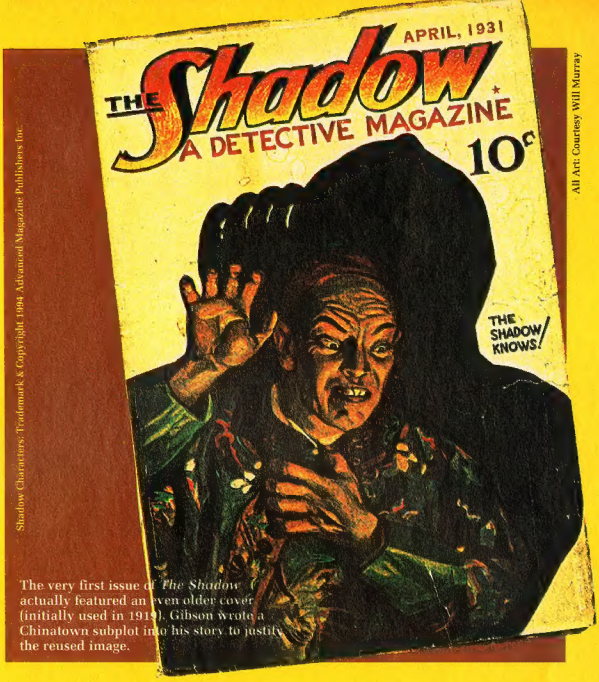
death, director Russell (*Highlander*) Mulcahy, screenwriter David (*Jurassic Park*) Koepp and actor Alec Baldwin teamed to make *The Shadow* (due out in July).

However, it wasn't that long wait which annoyed the man who created The Shadow. He had seen more than a half-a-dozen films, one serial and a long-running radio program made from his creation. What had angered him was that the film option tied up reprint rights to Gibson's Shadow novels. All 283 of them.

But there was nothing Gibson could do. He no longer owned *The Shadow*—the result of a contract dispute with pulp publisher Street & Smith in 1947. Now, two corporations controlled the product of his imagination: Conde Nast Publications, Inc.—successors to Street & Smith—and Universal Studios. Universal's option gave them a percentage of any book tie-ins with *The Shadow*, and they wanted a moratorium on reprints until the film premiered. Gibson had no say in the matter.

It was a sad ending to the career of one of the most prolific writers of the 20th century. Gibson got an early start in print. He was first published in *St. Nicholas Magazine* when he was *seven* years old. It was only the first amazing accomplishment in a long career.



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All Art: Courtesy Will Murray

The very first issue of *The Shadow* actually featured an even older cover (initially used in 1919). Gibson wrote a Chinatown subplot into his story to justify the reused image.

A former insurance salesman, carnival illusionist and Philadelphia crime reporter, Gibson's freelance career during the '20s was dotted with numerous notable firsts. As early as 1922, he was doing a radio show—a tie-in with his magic columns—over Philadelphia's WIP. In 1927, while editing *Tales of Magic and Mystery* magazine, he bought one of the few horror stories H.P. Lovecraft sold outside of *Weird Tales*. He was also the man to whom the estate of the late Harry Houdini opened its secrets. Two classic books—*Houdini's Magic* and *Houdini's Escapes*—resulted.

Gibson became friendly with other magicians, including Blackstone, Dunninger and Thurston, whose "autobiography" Gibson ghosted. It was through Thurston that he first "met" The Shadow.

"I was with Thurston in his Long Island home in 1929 or 1930," Gibson recalled. "He was interested in starting a radio program, so we would turn on the radio to hear what was on it. *The Detective Story Hour* was one of the things we happened to hear. It didn't particularly fit what we were planning, so we just dismissed it."

*The Detective Story Hour* was a dramatization of stories from Street & Smith's weekly pulp, *Detective Story Magazine*. Each week, the narrator—known only as The Shadow—read a story from the upcoming issue. It was just a publicity gimmick, but the weird voice, his blood-chilling laugh and the catchphrase, "The Shadow Knows," captured the nation's imagination in those early days of radio. The Shadow—whose radio persona was the invention of scriptwriter Harry Charlot—didn't do *Detective Story Magazine* much good. Radio listeners forgot its name, and asked for "that Shadow magazine." This gave Street & Smith Business Manager Henry W. Ralston an idea—publish a magazine called *The Shadow*.

As it happened, Ralston's plans were to dramatically affect Gibson's life. But at the time he first heard The Shadow's creepy laugh, Gibson had no inkling of the future it promised.

"I didn't listen to *The Detective Story Hour* regularly," Gibson explained. "It came on Thursday nights and talked about the magazine, which came out on Friday. I was more interested in what was in the magazine because I wanted to write magazine stories. By that time, I had a young yearning for fiction."

Design & Layout: Luis Ramos

Art: Graves Gladney

**Shiwan Khan, The Shadow's greatest foe, debuted in *The Golden Master* and returned three more times. Portrayed by John Lone, he now brings his ancient evil to the film.**

Gibson's first break came in 1928, when he stepped down from the editorship of *True Strange Stories* to write for the magazine. He submitted his first effort, "Why I Am Called A Witch," and it was accepted the same day. Not only that, it became the cover story!

However, selling fiction isn't always simple. *True Strange Stories* was cancelled at the end of 1929, as the Depression began. He might have abandoned his dreams but for a chance encounter. Henry Ralston had just turned the task of producing the first issue of *The Shadow* to Editor-in-Chief Frank Blackwell, suggesting that the quickest way to get the issue out would be to rewrite an old Nick Carter novel. This was in December 1930.

**By fall 1932, the magazine was so successful that it was being published every two weeks. Contracted to write 24 novels in one year, Gibson ended up penning a surprising 28!**

"I just happened to stop by to talk about doing some crime articles for *Detective Story Magazine*, and Blackwell told me about the Shadow project," Gibson remembered. "We both agreed that switching a stylized detective like Nick Carter into a mysterious figure to be called The Shadow would be somewhat incongruous. Then, I told him some rather fanciful ideas I already had, and he told me to go ahead. I went back to Philadelphia, where I was living at the time, and did several chapters, which I brought in a few days later for Blackwell's approval. It was lucky that I did. In the hurry to get the new magazine underway, the art department had saved time and money by digging up an old cover painting used on a 1919 magazine, which showed a startled character in Chinese costume casting a grotesque shadow on the wall behind him." Undaunted, Gibson introduced a subplot set in Chinatown and turned in the story ahead of schedule.

"They wanted a name for The Shadow's raconteur and I was asked to choose one," Gibson noted. "So, I ran down a list of magic dealers whom I knew and juggled their first and last names, coming up with 'Maxwell Grant' from the names of Maxwell Holden and U.F. Grant."

Because Street & Smith's first priority was to secure a magazine trademark, Gibson was given free rein to create a Shadow in his own image. On the radio, The Shadow was a sinister figure, more like the voice of Fate than a flesh-and-blood character. At first, Gibson simply fleshed out that idea.

"In the first story, *The Living Shadow*," Gibson explained, "he was both a nebulous figure and a master of disguise who could appear almost anywhere, as anybody. But then *The Shadow* sold out, to everyone's surprise, and I was told to go ahead with the next three stories, developing the character as I went along. In *The Eyes of The Shadow*, he was identified as Lamont Cranston, a millionaire globe-trotter, whose mission was to combat

**In the early stories, The Shadow was "both a nebulous figure and a master of disguise."**

Art: George Rozen

crime. But in *The Shadow Laughs*, it turned out that The Shadow merely assumed that guise when the real Lamont Cranston was traveling in distant lands. By then, The Shadow had become a cloaked crimefighter."

Gibson quickly found himself riding a literary comet. *The Shadow* went from a tentative quarterly in spring 1931 to being published every two weeks by fall 1932. He was given a contract to deliver two Shadow novels *a month*. Gibson nervously signed, and a year later had fulfilled that contract to the letter—including four extra Shadow novels!

On the radio, The Shadow's fortunes were not as rich. The first radio Shadow, James LaCurto, was replaced by the more sinister Frank Readick Jr. after only a few weeks. When parental groups complained that Readick's Shadow gave children nightmares, he was yanked off the air. At one point, The Shadow was reduced to hosting Street & Smith's *Love Story Hour*.

But when the Ruthrauff & Ryan advertising agency decided to revive the *Shadow* program in 1937, Street & Smith insisted that they base the new version on the magazine stories. It was a classic case of the tail wagging the dog, but it worked. *The Shadow* became the hottest radio drama ever—thanks in part to a master stroke of casting. A young Orson Welles was chosen to play the role of the Master of Darkness, better known to radio listeners as Lamont Cranston. Gibson's complex Chinese box system of multiple identities proved too difficult to replicate over the air, so Cranston was firmly established as the true name of The Shadow. In the pulp, Gibson had already revealed that The Shadow was really Kent Allard, an aviator known as the Dark Eagle during his World War I spy days.

For the radio show, The Shadow's network of crimefighting agents—who included Harry Vincent and cab driver Moe Shrevnitz—were replaced by Margo Lane, Cranston's "friend and companion." She was the only familiar character *not* created by Gibson.

"They added Margo Lane because of the voice contrast," Gibson revealed. In fact, the script's first draft featured The Shadow's right-hand man, Harry Vincent. His role was rewritten as Margo Lane, who was based on Broadway actress Margot Stevenson. As the radio program grew in popularity, he was forced to include her in his novels—a necessity he understood, though he didn't agree with it.

"Around the office," Gibson laughed, "the old joke used to be, 'Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? *Margo* knows.' "

Shadow Film Photos: Ralph Nelson/Copyright 1994 Universal City Studios Inc.

**Today, Gibson's *The Living Shadow* takes form as Alec Baldwin laughs on screen in the Russell Mulcahy-directed film.**

Gibson never wrote for the *Shadow* radio program; he was too busy writing the novels. But he recalled sitting down with the original *Shadow* radio writer, Edward Hale Bierstadt, to confer over the show.

"That first script followed the Shadow pattern pretty well," Gibson commented. "But Ruthrauff & Ryan insisted on changing it to suit their particular ideas. So, Hale went in and they tried to appease him. They read it to him and when they got through, they said, 'What do you think?'

"He said, 'I think it was written by an imbecilic child who was dropped on its head at the age of six weeks,' " Gibson recounted, laughing in obvious agreement. "He just walked out on it." Clearly, Gibson never considered the radio Shadow to be *his* Shadow. He was not a regular listener.

**Gibson employed his knowledge of magic, mentalism and escape artistry to give The Shadow's adventures a special flair.**

Nor did Gibson make a point of catching the various Shadow movies, which included two Grand National films starring Rod LaRocque in the mid-30s, *The Shadow Strikes* (based loosely on *The Ghost in the Manor*) and *International Crime*, and a trio of '40s Monogram features in which Kane Richmond played The Shadow: *The Shadow Returns*, *Behind the Mask* and *The Missing Lady*. There had also been a series of six 1931 filmettes based on *The Detective Story Hour* version of The Shadow, in which The Shadow merely *narrated* the action. But the most obscure Shadow film was Republic's *Invisible Avenger* in 1958. Richard Derr played Lamont Cranston in that poorly-distributed radio-inspired feature. In addition, a Shadow TV pilot starring British actor Tom Halmore was made in 1955—a year after the radio show was cancelled—but never aired.

"I've seen part of them," Gibson announced. "I don't remember them very well." In fact, he reserves his praise for only one Shadow adaptation, the 1940 Columbia serial *The Shadow*, based on

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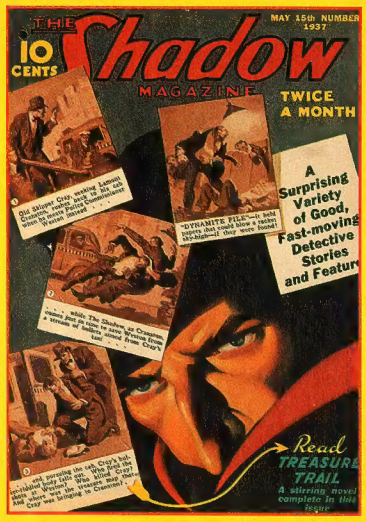



**The radio series discarded Gibson's complex Chinese box set of multiple identities. On the air, The Shadow *was* Lamont Cranston.**

**Street & Smith publicity releases ballyhooed Gibson's authorial achievements. Ultimately, he wrote 283 Shadow novels.**

his novel, *The Lone Tiger*, which starred his fellow dabbler in magic, Victor Jory.

"I liked the Victor Jory stuff," Gibson admitted. "It was very consistent. They took the highlights and did what they wanted with them. I thought it was very good. I knew Victor very well. He did a good Shadow. He fit the part."

Gibson's Shadow was, on the surface, a cloaked mystery man combining the cool intellectual powers of Sherlock Holmes with a two-gun crimefighting philosophy that would make Mack Bolan grow pale. But the real heart of The Shadow was his emphasis on magic. On radio, it was the supernatural magic of invisibility. In Gibson's novels, it was stage magic adapted for crimefighting. Houdini's escapes, Dunninger's mentalist tricks, Blackstone's illusions—The Shadow transplanted them all from the vaudeville halls to the streets of gritty New York.

"Some of the radio scripts were more or less taken from Shadow stories," Gibson observed. "But actually, because of my heavy use of magic and visual illusion, the novels are *ideally* suited for movies or television."

Considering potential screen Shadows, Gibson remained puzzled regarding the Zemeckis-Gale *Shadow* script. The filmmakers' intentions, at that time, were to rely on the radio show.

Gibson was candid about that idea. "They're cockeyed. There's one thing people should always remember about radio. Like the silent movie, it was a limited vehicle. We let them take liberties with The Shadow on radio.

"I don't see where they would get any great inspiration from the radio series. The first radio program just had a narrator, and could be compared with *The Mysterious Traveler* and *The Whistler*. The *real* Shadow unquestionably began when they took Lamont Cranston and the basic characters from *The Shadow* magazine. But the scripters aimed for good radio rather than for character development.

"The trouble is they're dealing with a classic, like the Oz books. I find there are people of two classes: The ones who have read *The Shadow* and others who have heard it on the radio. They all recognize him. It's not something where you take a title and kick it around."

Kicking The Shadow around is what Gibson feels happened with Leslie Newman's *Shadow* script. Although once supportive of this screenplay—which was loosely based on his novel, *The Shadow's Shadow*—deep down Gibson wasn't very happy with it either.

"I don't think much of it," Gibson revealed. "They tried to do it like *Superman* [which Newman co-scripted]. They tried to go back to what The Shadow/Lamont Cranston/Kent Allard had done before he *became* The Shadow. With all the wealth of stuff they had to pick from in *The Shadow*, you would think they would take something *typical* of it. Why don't they read my Shiwan Khan stories?"

Fortunately, though, Mulcahy and Koepp did take a look at Gibson's tales—and Shiwan Khan (as portrayed by John Lone) *is* the villain of the new *Shadow* movie, which while not based specifically on any of the four pulp novels wherein The Shadow battled the sinister descendant of Genghis Khan, borrows heavily from the first two, *The Golden Master* and *Shiwan Khan Returns*.

Gibson understood the filmmakers' need to adapt his character. For Street & Smith, he scripted six years of *Shadow Comics*, taking his own liberties with the character. During the '40s, he adapted for radio several other Street & Smith characters, including Nick Carter, Frank Merriwell and The Avenger. In the '60s, he was writing novelizations of *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* and the original *Twilight Zone*. Gibson did two *Twilight Zone* books, turning the TV scripts into short stories, and adding original stories of his own. Fans of the classic TV series have long been puzzled at their inability to recognize many of the stories contained in *The Twilight Zone* and *The Twilight Zone Revisited*.

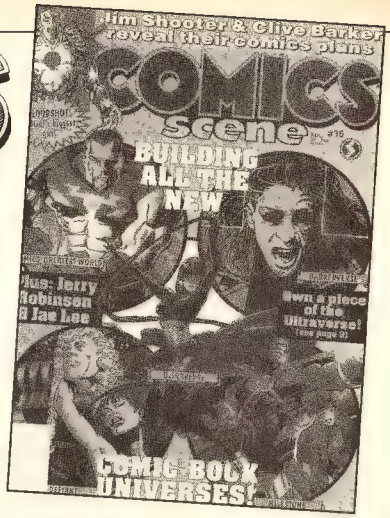
"Most of it was original," Gibson revealed. "They had good scripts, but they had very little action. They were mostly suspense. I had to punch them up a little bit in order to bring them to the reader."

But in 1985, after literally years of crushing delays, Gibson's original optimism over Universal's Shadow film had waned. After all, no less than Orson Welles had attempted a major Shadow movie in 1948, which he intended to direct from a Charles Lederer script, only to have the project collapse for lack of backing.

"I don't expect this film to be consistent with *The Shadow*," Gibson admitted, "any more than Sherlock Holmes movies were consistent with

*(continued on page 72)*

# COMICS scene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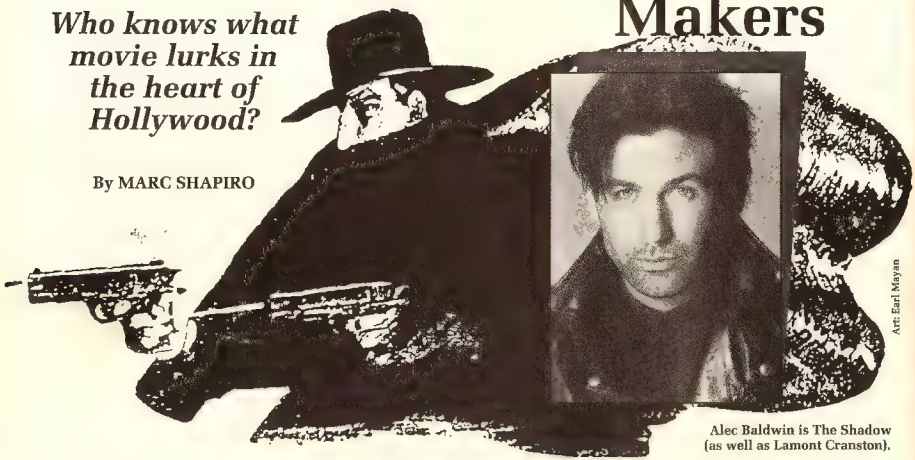
# The Shadow Makers

## *Who knows what movie lurks in the heart of Hollywood?*

By MARC SHAPIRO



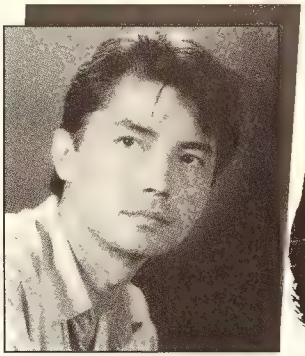
Art: Earl Mayan

Alec Baldwin is The Shadow (as well as Lamont Cranston).

The Shadow has dwelt in the dark for the better part of 60 years, guns always ready to blaze away at evil. But can a crime-fighting hero (created by Walter Gibson) who made his mark primarily in pulp novels and radio shows long before television was a twinkle in anybody's eye capture a '90s audience weaned on MTV? It seems a logical question. And producer Martin Bregman has a logical answer.

"That's why you're here," he chuckles to the roomful of media gathered to officially witness the launching of the big-budget motion picture version of *The Shadow* (which began filming at various Southern California locations on September 27).

This confab, played out against the backdrop of the Cobalt Club, the hangout of The Shadow's alter-ego Lamont Cranston in the film, also features appearances by the stellar cast: Alec (*Beetlejuice*) Baldwin, Penelope Ann (*Kindergarten Cop*) Miller, John (*The Last Emperor*) Lone, Peter (*Young Frankenstein*) Boyle, Sir Ian (*And the Band Played On*) McKellen, Jonathan Winters and last-minute cast addition Tim (*Legend*) Curry. But, for the moment, it is producer Bregman who heralds the coming of *The Shadow* (slated for a summer '94 release).



Art: Edd Cartier

Evil incarnate, Shiwan Khan is played by John Lone.

"*The Shadow* is kind of an American folk legend," says the producer. "And he's a truly original character. In the '30s, it was easy to tell the good guys from the bad guys: the good guys wore white and the bad guys wore black. But suddenly there was The Shadow: A crimefighter who wore black and who knew what evil lurked in the hearts of men."

For Bregman, the start of shooting

Art: Paul Orban

Portraying lovely Margo Lane is Penelope Ann Miller

and the previous movies [five low-budget features, one serial] didn't explore. Coming up with just the right villain was the big choice.

"Basically the whole process just required a lot of thought. Beyond that, it was just a matter of writing that first draft and then rewriting it for the rest of my natural life," he laughs.

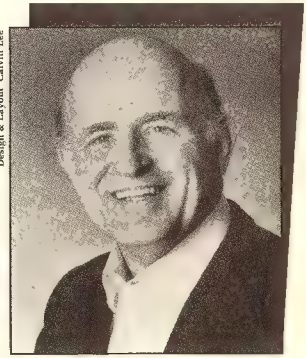
Koepp goes on to point out that *The Shadow* was perfect for radio "because he was *invisible*. When he clouded men's minds, you weren't aware of it. Obviously, with film, we have the added attraction of being able to see it. There were new rules that had to be invented to make *The Shadow* a compelling visual event. Russell has worked very hard to find ways to man-

The Shadow: Copyright 1993 The Conde Nast Publications Inc. All Pulp Art: The Shadow Scrapbook All Photos: Courtesy Universal City Studios

represents the end of a long, personal odyssey. Universal Pictures originally acquired the rights more than a decade ago—with Bregman as producer—and announced to the world, in May 1980, that there would be a *Shadow* film.

Over the years, there were scripts by both original *Superman* screenwriter Leslie Newman and *Back to the Future*'s Bob Gale (which featured a gangster straight out of *White Heat*). The roster of directors either mentioned or actually associated with the project include Richard Donner, Joe Dante, Bob Zemeckis and Tom Holland. Among those noted as possible Shadows were John Travolta, Daniel Day-Lewis and Al Pacino (star of such Bregman-produced films as *Scarface* and *Scent of a Woman*).

Art: Tom Lavell



Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

Peter Boyle drives The Shadow as cabbie Moe Shrevnitz.

Directed by Russell (*Highlander*) Mulcahy from a David (*Jurassic Park*) Koepp script, *The Shadow* offers the origin of Lamont Cranston and his Shadow (Baldwin), who, according to sketchy story details, pits his powerful mental abilities against the telepathic super-villain Shiwan Khan (Lone) with the future of mankind at stake. Aiding The Shadow in this battle set against an indeterminate, '30s-toned time period are his friend and confidante Margo Lane (Miller), Boyle as cab driver and Shadow agent Moe Shrevnitz, McKellen as scientist Reinhardt Lane and Curry as techno-nerd Farley Claymore. Winters portrays Police Commissioner Wainwright Barth. Behind the scenes, key creative personnel include costume designer Bob (*Batman*) Ringwood and composer Jerry Goldsmith.

Baldwin, whose acquaintance with *The Shadow* begins and ends with the radio shows, claims to have discovered in Koepp's script "a definite split between Lamont Cranston and The Shadow.

"Cranston is a little devilish," he explains. "He uses his powers to seduce women in restaurants and for other questionable purposes. He's fun, he's evil but, in a sense, it's a recovering evil. You'll get to see what he was like in the beginning; how he's saved and taught to use his skills to fight crime. But, in the process, he also discovers that in order to use his mental powers, he must plumb the depths of all that evil.

"I really didn't have to do much research," he continues in a positive nod to Koepp's script. "All the work has been done by David. I just have to say the words and play what's written. It all just takes care of itself. More often than not I have to come in and make more of what is there. With *The Shadow*, my responsibility is to be as good as what is on the page."

Koepp, for his part, says that *The Shadow* script "meets halfway between the sensibilities of the pulp novels and the radio show.

"Writing this script was actually fairly easy," Koepp recalls of the three years and 15-20 drafts that went into his efforts. "It was difficult in the sense that we wanted to create an overall myth for The Shadow and get into areas that the novels, the radio shows ifest The Shadow as other than an invisible man."

Mulcahy adds that casting *The Shadow* took time "because it was important to get great actors. They're going to make my job of creating a very rich film that much easier.

"My basic challenge is to create illusions, drama, suspense, humor and many surprises," Mulcahy continues. "*The Shadow* is a myth of great magnitude. Sure, there will be massive sets and special FX, but the big thing will be to breathe life into *The Shadow* mythos and to introduce him to a whole new generation."

Baldwin concludes the proceedings when he attempts to analyze the reason why *The Shadow* has survived long enough in the public consciousness to justify a '90s-style movie interpretation.

"People like the idea of characters who have powers they could easily use for evil or personal gain but don't," Alec Baldwin observes. "People, deep down inside, probably wish somebody like The Shadow would materialize in real life." CS

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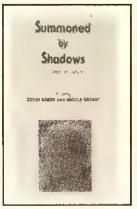


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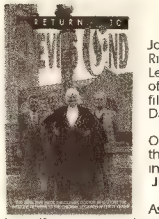


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# A MAN CALLED FLINTSTONE

***Yabba-dabba-doo! Henry Corden still speaks for the cartoon caveman.***

By KYLE COUNTS

Re-creating a role that someone else has made famous is a tricky bit of show business, even when that role is only a two-dimensional figment of an animator's imagination. Henry Corden knows what it's like to follow a tough act: In 1977, after the death of actor Alan Reed, he became the new Fred Flintstone, head of Hanna-Barbera's enduring prehistoric cartoon family, *The Flintstones*, which premiered in 1960 on ABC and ran for six seasons in prime-time.

"I was kind of destined to do [the part]," says Corden, "although Hanna-Barbera did audition many others at the time, just in case. But I wound up with it."

At the time of the changeover, Corden, who joined Hanna-Barbera's stable of voiceover artists in 1961, was quite familiar with Fred. Not only had he ghosted for Reed on the show when Flintstone was required to sing, he had also filled in for the ailing actor when voice problems prevented him from

**Corden knew *The Flintstones* would still be around today to celebrate life as a modern stone-age family.**

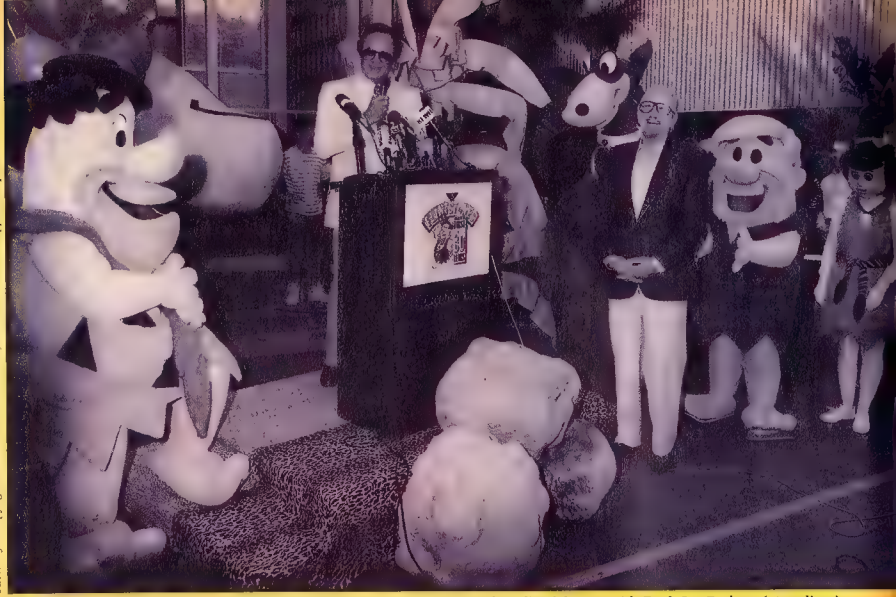

Photo: By & Copyright 1991 Scott Downie/Courtesy Hanna-Barbera/The Lippin Group

**At the *Flintstones 30th Anniversary* salute, Henry Corden (with glasses & beard) celebrates with Fred, Joe Barbera (at podium), Dino, Barney and Betty.**

participating in two *Flintstones* spoken-word records. "I did the records because [Hanna-Barbera] needed them right away—they couldn't wait until his voice got better," Corden explains.

Taking over for Reed was, not surprisingly, a source of anxiety for Corden, who knew that, by then, Fred Flintstone had become "deeply imbedded in the culture of America, certainly young America." He was confident of his talent, but would the *Flintstones* cast—principally, Jean VanderPyl (Wilma) and Mel Blanc (Barney Rubble)—accept him as the new Fred?

"Was I nervous? Absolutely," Corden admits. "Because even if the cast accepted me, would the public accept me? The first time I played Fred [after Reed's death], I was so nervous that my nose began to bleed. The rest of the time everything went smoothly, and I was immediately taken into the cast's bosom. It was wonderful.

"Strangely enough, the change was accepted and no big deal was made about it. In fact, the only people who knew that there was a change were people within the industry. I'm sure there were some people out there with good ears who recognized the difference, but I was pretty much accepted."

Comparing his Fred to Reed's makes Corden uncomfortable. "I don't know that I would compare them. That wouldn't be for me to say. I hadn't even thought about it." He does acknowledge, however, that there were basic differences in their respective approaches to the character's voice.

"We had to be different, for one important reason: Alan used his natural voice. I had to go away from my natural voice and re-create it to make it sound like Fred. That being the case, it made it quite a bit more difficult. Fred is more blustery than my own voice, a little deeper and tougher. You know, [assuming a Jackie Gleason voice] coming out of this kind of situation.

"As the years have gone by, I've made Fred more and more my own. Rather than sound as much like Alan's Fred as I could, I've more and more made it my own as a matter of comfort for me. Nowadays, it's more my voice than Alan's. My Fred has a different attitude than Alan's."

The widespread rumor that *The Flintstones* was inspired by/borrowed from Jackie Gleason's *The Honeymooners* is "absolutely accurate," says Corden. "Jackie is, of course, very close to Fred Flintstone. That's exactly who Fred was based on. As a matter of fact, from what I understand, Jackie Gleason was going to sue [when he heard about *The Flintstones*]. But *The Flintstones* became so popular and lovable, that he decided not to for fear it would reflect on him!"

Further commenting on the similarities between Fred and Ralph Kramden, Corden adds, "Like Ralph [Kramden], Fred is a lovable guy who's not too smart. Somebody—usually it was Wilma—always ends up helping him pick up the marbles so that he can go on with life. And that's just about everybody, I think. None of us is so smart that we're complete captains of our souls. We always have help."

Corden proved so adept at mimicking Gleason that he was asked to reloop Gleason's salty dialogue for the *Smokey & the Bandit* movies when it came time to sanitize them for TV airing. "There were a lot of four-letter words in those pictures," he chuckles.

Ask the show business veteran if he ever thought his acting career would encompass stage, screen *and* cartoons, and Corden's reply makes it clear that the performing arts were the *only* line of work he ever truly considered.

"I was born in Montreal, Canada, but my family moved to New York when I was very young. That's when I saw *Flying Down to Rio*, one of Fred Astaire's first pictures. I saw Fred Astaire and I said, 'My God, that's what I want to be!'—meaning up there on screen, acting, dancing, dressing the way that he did."

Corden attended school in New York, but jumped ship before high school graduation ("I got out of there as soon as I could"). At age 16, he joined a New York theatrical group that performed three to four live stage shows a year. "The only training I had was in

front of an audience," he says of his formal acting education. "You learned what it was to get a laugh and a tear and all the rest, which is all you can do in a classroom."

At 18, Corden took a job as social director on the borscht circuit in the Catskill Mountains. Following that, he "did a little bit of everything—stage, radio, a little dancing"—before relocating in 1944 to Los Angeles. There he was put under contract to agent Harry Sherman for a year, during which time he co-starred in *Golden Boy* at the Pasadena Playhouse. "Unfortunately, I didn't do any pictures because the industry was in a bad way at the time," he remarks, referring to the pinch being felt in Hollywood due to WWII.

Dropped by Sherman after his contract's expiration, Corden fortunately landed a role in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (1947) opposite Danny Kaye, playing a villain along with Boris Karloff. Other pictures followed, including 1952's *Scaramouche* ("One of the highlights of my life—it was a very small role, but it was so edifying"), *Viva Zapata!* (1952), *Jupiter's Darling* (1955) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956). In the '60s, a whole new generation would discover Corden when he turned up on sitcoms like *Mr. Ed*, *Hogan's Heroes* and *The Monkees* (where he played the Monkees' landlord, Mr. Babbitt). The latter experience was—to borrow a phrase of the era—a "trip" for Corden. " 'Crazy' was the word for it! There was a kind of anarchy about the boys' attitudes that made it a little tough for me because I was a very traditional actor. But I got used to it, especially by the second season."

"I've more and more made [Fred's voice] my own," says Corden.

"Mel [Blanc] was great fun to work with," recalls Corden. "We were a good team."

Looking back over his stage and screen career affords Corden a special satisfaction. "I was rather fortunate. I did various kinds of roles—everything from funny guys to villains, Americans to foreigners—which was very good on the one hand, but on the other hand, it wasn't because they like to typecast you in Hollywood, and I was constantly in competition with other actors in all these areas. Still, I had my share of work; I did well."

Voiceover work entered the picture around 1961, when, thanks to his friend Herschel Bernardi, Corden landed the part of the little fish opposite Charlie the Tuna (voiced by Bernardi) in a series of Starkist Tuna commercials. "I signed with Herschel's agent, and he sent me out on a general audition to Hanna-Barbera—and that's how it all started," he says.

From that open call, Corden played various animated characters for Hanna-Barbera—a mumbling papa bear, an "Indian Indian"—before being tapped as a regular for *Jonny Quest* in 1964. Each week, Jonny

(played by Tim Matheson) and his father, Dr. Benton Quest (John Stephenson, who also voiced Mr. Slate on *The Flintstones*; later Don Messick), seemed to run into an exotic new villain of some kind, which was fine by Corden. "Some of the places they visited were make-believe places, and I had to make up special dialects—that was fun."

Fred Flintstone marked the next phase of Corden's career, a phase that saw him through 1986's *The Flintstone Kids* (where he played *both* of "Freddy" Flintstone's parents) and continues to this day. Did he find it difficult stepping into Alan Reed's shoes? "Not really," Corden remarks, "because I pretty well understood the character, having worked on the show before. The only hard part was getting into the groove that had been established by Alan—finding the same thrust to the character, the same sound. It was a technical thing. Now it's getting easier because Fred is becoming more and more me. But I had to be mostly Alan in the beginning, and that's a very difficult thing to do, to pattern yourself after someone else."

Did the actor ever think *The Flintstones* would enjoy such long-running popularity? "In this case, I did," he admits. "There are certain things you know will go on and on, like Mickey Mouse. Who would have thought that Mickey Mouse would have lasted 60 years when he first started? But there he is, he's still there.

"People love Fred because he's a kind of Everyman, and those who watch the cartoons...if you're very young, you're amused by him; if you're older, you can feel a little superior to him and, at the same time, recognize yourself in him and say, 'Even though I'm not the smartest guy, somehow things will come out OK.' And, just like with Fred, they usually do."

As Corden has not seen *The Simpsons*, he's unable to comment incisively on the comparisons that critics have drawn between Fred Flintstone and Homer Simpson. "I don't know why I haven't seen the show; it just doesn't occur to me. I'm probably watching something else when it's on. But I wish it well." Told that Homer has a knack for getting into jams and, by the episode's end, realizing the error of his ways, Corden agrees that the basic set-up is "exactly what happened on *The Flintstones* each week."

His "best" memories of *The Flintstones* are of working with the late Mel Blanc (see page 26), who voiced the role of Fred's next-door neighbor and best friend, Barney Rubble. "Mel was great fun to work with; we were great together, we were a good team," Corden says. "We respected each other and got along well. We made great jokes with each other. It was a good relationship. That I remember—that and my relationship with Jean VanderPyl [Wilma], the only original member of the group [still living; see page 21 for an interview].

"Jean...what can I say? She's an old trouper from way back, from radio. A lovely, lovely lady who was most helpful when I took over for Alan—all of the actors were, but her in particular. I see her whenever there's something to do with the Flintstones that Wilma appears in. But, unfortunately, there aren't many commercials done with Wilma; they're usually with Barney and Fred. Wilma doesn't seem to enter into [ad agency] Ogilvy & Mather's advertising approach [as far as the cereal commercials]. The last time I saw Jean was when we taped the *Flintstones 30th Anniversary Show*. We're scheduled to do an English commercial soon, for—of all things—a Flintstones *pasta*."

**After *The Jetsons Meet the Flintstones*, anything's possible. And in fact, the live-action *Flintstones* movie is in theaters now.**

As for the stories circulating in Toontown that NBC has in the works a two-hour animated *Flintstones* movie, Corden says it is, at this point, only gossip. "There's talk that in the latter part of the year, we'll be doing a two-hour movie. I know nothing about it other than that. I would be re-creating my role as Fred, though I haven't actually sat down and negotiated anything yet—that'll happen when they say to my agent, 'We want to do it on such-and-such a date. Is Henry available?' Then, we start negotiating."

If the movie did well, would Corden consider being part of a new *Flintstones* TV series? "Absolutely," he shoots back. "I love doing Fred. It's such lovely, easy work, and the people I work with are so nice, why wouldn't I?" he asks rhetorically.

"And if the movie did well, I'm sure NBC would say, 'Hey, Hanna-Barbera: *Do it.*' But it's not Hanna-Barbera that makes that kind of decision; it's the network. If we have big ratings and many people want it, then by all means, I would do it."

Corden's feelings about the upcoming live-action *Flintstones* movie (starring John Goodman) are on the neutral side. "I didn't feel any terrible pangs of any kind [when I heard about it]," he says. "I could see where

**The actor would love to do a new *Flintstones* TV series, but remains neutral about a live-action film.**

Goodman would be right for the part. The only question is: Is it the right thing to do, a live-action version? On the other hand, if it works, it works, and that's fine. It's no skin off my tush."

As for having a preference between the "live" performing arts or voiceover work, Corden diplomatically chooses both. "I enjoyed it all; each had its own special challenges. I enjoyed acting very much; that's why I did as much stage work as I did. It's the final judge of an actor's ability to get up on stage for two hours and keep the audience amused—to not stop and go, as you do in films or TV. And I enjoy doing voiceovers. But I retired from appearing in front of the camera about 10 years ago."

His last film, in fact, was the Chevy Chase comedy *Modern Problems*, wherein Corden played the mâitre d' of Dubrovnik's, a restaurant "named after a city in Yugoslavia. That was the last thing I did—I'd kinda had it by then for various reasons."

Currently, Corden is under contract to Ogilvy & Mather, the ad agency that produces the Flintstones cereal TV spots. He also does commercials "here and there" for other products. Last March, he participated in a publicity campaign on behalf of the LA Children's Hospital, a fund-raising effort co-sponsored by Hanna-Barbera and Denny's Restaurants. Otherwise, Corden is content to sit back and enjoy the fruits of his labors.

"Now I'm just doing voiceovers, and I'm enjoying it very much," he says. "They'll call me and I'll go in for a few hours. I don't push for work any more. I do a lot of traveling these days. I've been to wonderful places: China, Japan, Paris, London. We have a ball doing that."

As to whether or not he would be happy being remembered as the latter-day voice of Fred Flintstone, Henry Corden beams, "If I'm remembered at all, wouldn't that be wonderful? No matter how."

**"I love doing Fred," says Corden. "It's such easy work, and the people I work with are so nice."**

All Flintstones Characters & Art: Copyright 1983, 1985, 1987,1990, 1991 Hanna-Barbera Productions Inc.

# The Mouth of Flintstone

For Alan Reed, voicing the world's most famous caveman was the pinnacle of a career that spanned the stage, radio, motion pictures, TV, records and nightclubs.

A native of New York City, he was born August 20, 1907 as Teddy Bergman. He majored in journalism at Columbia University, where he competed as an intercollegiate champion wrestler. But he was sidetracked to the stage with the Ralph Rose Stock Company from Oklahoma City, a venture that gave way to a short-lived candy business in Manhattan.

Radio boosted Reed to fame, just as it did his future *Flintstones* co-stars. His first broadcast was in 1926 on WOR-New York. His versatility (over 22 dialects) landed him as many as 31 parts a week. His best-known roles: Joe Palooka in the comic-strip derived *Joe Palooka* (1932), Fanny Brice's original daddy in *Baby Snooks*, Clancy the cop on *Duffy's Tavern* (1941), Solomon Levy of *Abie's Irish Rose* (1942), Shrevvy, the talkative cab driver in *The Shadow* (1940s), poet Falstaff Openshaw on *The Fred Allen Show* (1946) and Pasquale in *Life with Luigi* (1948-1953). He voiced Mr. Potchnik the piano teacher on the short-lived *Mel Blanc Show*.

**Whenever Fred sang, it was likely to be Henry Corden carrying the tune.**

"An actor was never seen, so he never had to worry about typecasting. It was the easiest buck ever made in show business," Reed told Margaret Harford of the *Los Angeles Times* in 1965. He performed on so many radio shows, "I made a good living through sheer volume."

The actor changed his name to Alan Reed in 1939, and his career expanded as he performed as a straight man for Al Jolson, Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Bert Lahr, Jimmy Durante, Eddie Cantor, George Burns and Gracie Allen.

He and his wife, singer Finette Walker, moved to Los Angeles in 1943. Reed began appearing in motion pictures, making almost 50, including *Days of Glory* (also Gregory Peck's first film), *Viva Zapata!* as Pancho Villa, *The Desperate Hours*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *The Seniors*. (His son, Alan Reed Jr., was also an actor.)

In 1955, he operated a sideline business in Hollywood: Alan Reed Enterprises, specializing in novelties and imported gifts. He told *Citizen News* reporter Nadine M. Edwards in 1967, "It is not only essential at times in this up-and-down world of show business, but it often affords the actor a sort of leverage when negotiating a contract. Producers are easier to come to terms with when they realize that the performer isn't over a barrel financially, and doesn't have to kowtow to their demands."

Also in 1955, Reed ventured into animation with Disney's *Lady and the Tramp*, voicing Boris. He also voiced the Sultan in UPA's *1001 Arabian Nights* (starring Jim Backus as Mr. Magoo), released in 1959. That year, Reed auditioned for *The Flintstones*, a cartoon series that was essentially a stone-age version of *The Honeymooners*.

"I thought *The Honeymooners* was the funniest show on the air," producer Bill Hanna admitted to COMICS SCENE's Kyle Counts in *The Hollywood Reporter*. "I thought the closer we could come to emulating it, without outright duplicating it, the better the results would be. The relationships between the two men were the same. Fred and Barney could certainly stand in for Ralph and Ed Norton. The difference was that the humor was more gentle. Fred wasn't as bombastic as Ralph, and there wasn't as much shouting and raving, although he was a guy who obviously had a temper."

But Fred Flintstone's voice belonged to comedian Hal Smith—at least, at first. Director Joe Barbera was dissatisfied with Fred and Barney's voices. At an alleged cost of $15,000, he ditched the soundtracks to the first five episodes, called in Alan Reed and Mel Blanc as replacements—and *The Flintstones* made prehistoric history.

Before Reed yelled his trademark, "Yabba Dabba Doo!" he prepared by gulping down spoonfuls of honey and lemon. But, according to Henry Corden (page 15), when it came to singing, "Alan Reed had kind of a tin ear." Corden, who replaced Reed after his death, did Flintstone's singing in the show, the movie and on a children's record.

Reed continued doing characters for Hanna-Barbera, such as Dum Dum, Touché Turtle's faithful sheepdog sidekick, who often plowed into rocks or trees when following his hero (*Touché Turtle*, 1962). He also voiced

**Alan Reed (pictured on page 23) initially mouthed off as Fred Flintstone.**

two minor villains in *Space Ghost* and *Jonny Quest*. In 1970, he voiced the loud-mouthed "Mad Dog" Maloney, coach of the Rhinos football team, in *Where's Huddles?*, a 10-episode summer replacement series on CBS.

From the late 1950s to the 1960s, Reed popped up in several live-action TV comedies. Among them: *The Addams Family* ("Cousin It Visits the Addams Family"), the pilot to *Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C.*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show* ("The Masterpiece" with *Atom Ant*'s Howard Morris), *Petticoat Junction*, *Batman*, *My Favorite Martian* and *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

Until his death June 14, 1977, Reed voiced Fred Flintstone in many other appearances: in commercials smoking Winston cigarettes, hawking One-A-Day Vitamins, Skippy Peanut Butter and Flintstone's Vitamins; the theatrical *A Man Called Flintstone* (1966), the 1966 TV special *Alice in Wonderland* as a two-headed caterpillar (the other head belonging to Barney Rubble), the Saturday morning *Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm* (1971-1972) and *The Flintstones Comedy Hour* (1972-1973).

"It has opened the path just by the voice being recognized by people in many unusual places," said Alan Reed in a press release. "I just completed a trip to various parts of the country, and because people recognized my voice and realized that it was Fred Flintstone, I really had some wonderfully warm experiences. It was somewhat of a surprise. In all the years I was doing work in radio, my voice was never [as] familiar to the public as it is now with *The Flintstones*. It's good to know that you're that close to the public."

*—Bob Miller*

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# Without Jean VanderPyl, Fred Flintstone's wife & Speaking of Wilma...

## the Jetsons' mechanical maid would be speechless.

By J. DOOLEY

For more than 50 years, Jean VanderPyl's voice characterizations have entertained animation enthusiasts around the globe. Surviving media changes and technological advances, VanderPyl, 74, has hundreds of voices to her credit, including that of America's favorite cavewife, Wilma Flintstone.

Long before television exploded into life, VanderPyl's dramatic talents graced the national airwaves via radio. She reluctantly admits to beginning her career right out of high school in 1937, and during radio's heyday, she worked with the top of the trade, Lucille Ball, Bob Hope, Red Skelton, Art Linkletter, Al Jolson and George Burns and Gracie Allen. Then, she turned her talents toward the new medium, television.

As television came to be the mecca of home entertainment, VanderPyl played cameo roles on many baby-boomer favorites, including *Leave It to Beaver*, *77 Sunset Strip*, *Dr. Kildare*, *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* and others, but her most unforgettable role came as Fred Flintstone's wife.

At the time, William Hanna and Joseph Barbera were casting for their latest TV animation projects. Fresh from New York, VanderPyl was ushered into Hanna-Barbera's fledgling Hollywood offices.

"It must have been late 1957 or early 1958," the actress recalls in her San Clemete home overlooking the Pacific Ocean. "And Joe and Bill had just gone into business for themselves. They had a little two-man office and a secretary. No studio or anything.

"I had a new agent, and he was a real go-getter. Joe was easy to see then, and my agent went in and gave a pitch for me. They had this little character coming up in a show [*Snooper & Blabbermouse*] and I auditioned for it.

"He [Barbera] was at a loss about hiring women, because up until that time, men had played all the female [animation] roles. The parts were all so small. The early stuff was mostly cats

All Flintstones & Jetsons Art & Characters: Copyright 1990 Hanna-Barbera Productions Inc.

Photo: John Fung/LA Times/Courtesy Jean VanderPyl

**"I knew Wilma was going to be liked when *The Flintstones* was originally shown on television," says Jean VanderPyl.**

chasing canaries, a lot of action and no words. They weren't used to much dialogue anyway—so they had men do it.

"That was my initial contact with Hanna-Barbera. I got the part. So, later, when other women's roles would come up, Joe would call and have me audition over the phone!

"Eventually, other actresses got on the stick too. Their agents got busy when they saw what was happening in the cartoon world. I firmly believe I was the *first* woman's voice for Hanna-Barbera."

Consequently, VanderPyl explains, "By the time they got around to *The Flintstones*, I had worked many different shows for Joe, so he included me in *all* of his auditions. But this time, they had us come into the studio...into *a* studio, because theirs still wasn't built yet. This was going to be something *big*, they hoped, so they had many people come in.

"I got Bea Benaderet to audition with me, because Joe wasn't familiar with her work. She was a well-known radio actress too, but people would recognize her face from television. She was Kate on *Petticoat Junction*. We came in and read both parts.

"She read Wilma and I read Betty. I read Wilma and *she* read Betty. That was really fun! Joe liked us both, and right then and there, he says, 'Who wants to be Wilma and who wants to be Betty?' That wouldn't happen today. I said I wanted to play Wilma. I just had a feeling for that character. I liked her better. He said, 'OK.'

"I really admire the characters from *The Flintstones*," she confesses. "Mel Blanc [Barney Rubble], Alan Reed [Fred Flintstone], such wonderful guys. I knew them for many years. The four of us were all together on *The Burns & Allen Show*. That's one of the reasons why *The Flintstones* went as well as it did. We got along great. I think it was *felt* that we were all such good friends. That made it real—we all really loved each other."

Recalls the actress, "It was all so casual and fun in those days. We would all read the script over and over, then we would come to the characters that weren't appointed yet. Joe would say, 'Jean, what do you have for this character? Let me hear a voice for this.' I would look at the little character and try a voice. Then, he would say, 'Bea, what have you got?' She would try a voice, then one of us would get the part." For most of the three seasons of *The Flintstones*, in fact, all of the female characters were played by either Benaderet or VanderPyl.

"Joe would show us the storyboards and then we would all read the script once around the table, aloud. Then, we all got up on mike and started recording. We stood up there and *acted* it. It was just like a radio show. We jumped around the studio and stage.

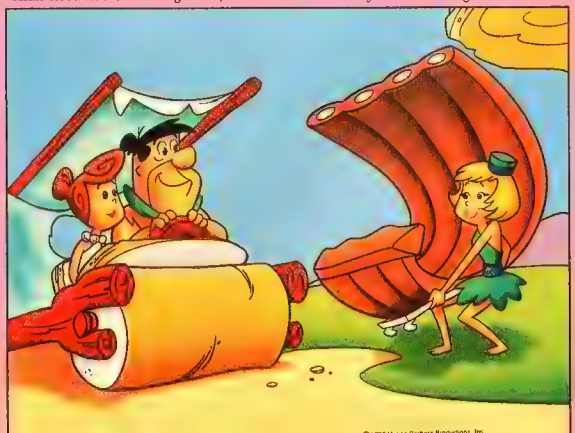
"There was a great deal of personal interplay between us. I remember, an example of that was when Pebbles [another one of VanderPyl's voices] was born. That last scene of Wilma in the hospital bed with Pebbles for the first time, I actually cried. I really did, because we were *acting* that part. I just had a few babies around that time and it was very real to me. Alan Reed had such a big heart, too; more than once, we got a little teary."

Thirty years after *The Flintstones* first aired, VanderPyl is amazed at the lasting impression her role as Wilma still has on people. "I've really only recently realized it," she sheepishly admits.

"I knew Wilma was going to be liked when *The Flintstones* was originally shown on television. Little kids liked me. The funny thing is, in the past few years, when I go places or meet people, they still go crazy!

"Recently, I was being interviewed on a talk show. The interviewer said something that made me go, *Boing*! He said, 'Jean, do you realize you probably have the best known female voice in the world?' I said, 'What?' He told me, 'Well, Wilma has been on somewhere for the past 30 years and is in 27 countries in English.' He had all the statistics down. 'You can go *anywhere* in the world and pull the voice out of the hat and they'd say, "Wow! I know

**"Alan Reed had such a big heart," remembers VanderPyl of Fred's original voice.**



**"I think it was *felt* that we were all such good friends," notes VanderPyl of the chemistry between herself (in black), Alan Reed, Bea Benaderet and Mel Blanc that brought the cave couples to life.**

you!" I never thought of it that way. I loved hearing that. It's really satisfying.

"My own son tells me, 'Mom, do you realize how famous you are?' I know this sounds awfully hammy, but being a radio actress, you're always anonymous, so I've never gotten any kind of star treatment.

"Now they come up to me in restaurants, the father carrying the kids, and *he* is the one grinning from ear to ear. His eyes light up and he says, 'I cannot believe I am meeting Wilma! You babysat me for six years.' It sure means much more than it ever did before.

"It's very gratifying and lots of fun to see people's faces light up. My water man was here this very morning and I told him I wasn't ready for him. I said I was up late the night before at the Hanna-Barbera *Flintstones* Anniversary party. 'What were you doing there?' he says. I told him that I do Wilma's voice. Well, he almost dropped the bottle! He said, 'What? You're kidding me!' So, then, he stayed and asked questions for 10 minutes. He ended up being late on his route. He said what so many of them do, 'Why, I grew up with you.' "

Of the many *Flintstones* episodes VanderPyl worked on, a few favorites stand out. One of them, *The Flintstones Meet Rockula and Frankenstone*, a TV special now available on video, holds a special place in her heart.

"The Flintstones win a prize on a talk show and go on vacation to Rockula's castle. Real cheesy. Well, Rockula, after 500 years in the basement, comes upstairs and thinks, since Wilma is asleep in his wife's bedroom, she is his long-lost wife. Wilma finally convinces him she isn't his wife, but he's already greatly enamored of her, wants her to marry him. Wilma says, 'But I can't! I am already married!' And then, John Stephenson [voice of Mr. Slate], who plays Rockula, says, 'I can take care of that.' He's going to kill Fred. The Rubbles are there and there is a chase through the castle.

"Being a ham, I guess, the thing I liked most was at the script's end. They return home and Rockula follows. He says, 'I will move the castle over here stone by stone.' Wilma says, 'Well, all right, but you'll have to take Pebbles to her dancing lessons on Tuesday; I play tennis on Thursday, dah-dah-dah...' She does this female thing for a page-and-a-half of solid dialogue, of what he'll have to do, and you see him shrivel and become a bat and take off.

"The reason I have a soft spot for that script, is that last page-and-a-half of fast, funny dialogue. I did it straight through in one take. It worked out just fine. When I finished, the whole cast applauded. And *that* is a rare thing, to have your peers do that. It meant so much to me. Mel, Henry Corden, the whole bunch of them. When they give you that kind of recognition, it leaves a very warm feeling in your heart."

Another of VanderPyl's Hanna-Barbera creations, Rosie the Robot of *The Jetsons*, grew in popularity and is still a favorite with fans. VanderPyl was asked to create a distinctive voice for the futuristic family's new robot.

"I don't think anyone expected Rosie to go as far as she did," she recalls. "Rosie was born in 1962. I had worked on *The Jetsons* several times before she was introduced. The Jetsons went to a robot store to hire a maid. All the robots were paraded out in

**One of VanderPyl's treasured moments from the series was the birth of Pebbles (whom she also voiced with "goos").**

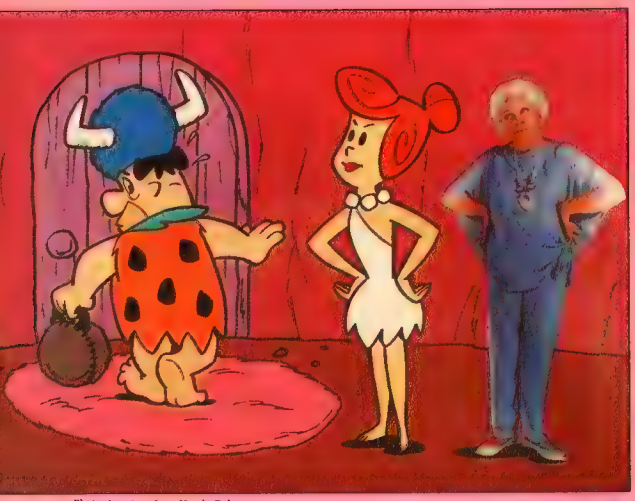


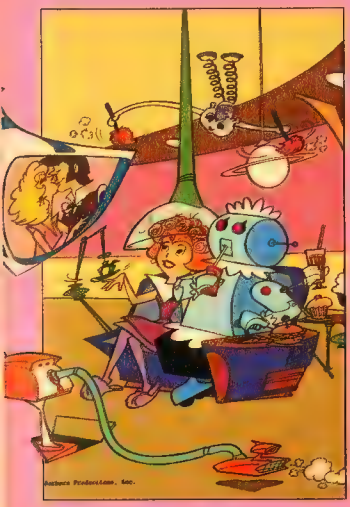
Photo Courtesy Jean VanderPyl

**Wilma puts her foot down at yet another of Fred's escapades—as VanderPyl herself adopts a familiar stance, both live-action and animated.**

front of Jane, for her to select from. Rosie was not old—broken down, but she was not the new French model." VanderPyl's voice transforms into that of a young French girl's, "Oh, *oui, monsieur!*'

"I did seven voices on that particular episode," she says in her own voice, which sounds little like her famous characters'. "More than I ever had in a single show. I did all the other maids auditioning."

**VanderPyl was given more leeway in her "creation" of Rosie the Robot.**



Having a freer hand in the development of Rosie than she did with Wilma, VanderPyl searched for just the right voice. "I really had to rack my brain for Rosie," she states. "I thought and I thought. Then, it came to me. I said, 'Wait a minute...*Hazel* [the '60s TV maid played by Shirley Booth]. This was the gal. She was older and a bit intimate with the boss, she told folks off, but she wasn't too bad about it. That's perfect for Rosie. That's where I got the idea for 'OK, Mr. J., never fear when Rosie's here.' They liked it and went with it."

Moving on in her years, VanderPyl remembers a *Jetsons* episode that again, she takes to heart. "My very favorite was the time Rosie feels really old. I guess that's why I relate to it now; she feels old and her circuits aren't working well anymore. She sees George Jetson looking at new model robots, although he's really there to buy replacement parts for Rosie, and she figures, 'That is all. This is it. The end of me. My time is up.' Then, she leaves a note for the family and heads for the junk heap. She's going to jump into the pressers to commit suicide. It's really sad. They rescue her and take her home."

Contrary to common belief, *The Jetsons* lasted a much shorter time than *The Flintstones*. The original series actually aired for only a single year, although that one season has been shown endlessly in syndication ever since. However, "About five or six years ago, the kids in college took up *The Jetsons* again," VanderPyl says happily. "Almost like the Trekkers, they started wearing *Jetsons* T-shirts and other stuff. My own son was wearing them. Hanna and Barbera said, 'Time to get on the bandwagon.' They decided to make two more years of *The Jetsons*, 40–42 new episodes, for syndication [STARLOG #101].

"So," VanderPyl laughs, "they brought the original cast back. We were the oldest cast in Hollywood. George O'Hanlon [who played George Jetson, CS #15] was blind and in a wheelchair. He had had a stroke so they recorded him separately, and of course, Mel Blanc, Daws Butler and myself. Penny Singleton just turned 80, she's the original Jane Jetson, she got her voice back up. We all managed to match our original voices."

Later, most of the original cast was reunited for 1990's *Jetsons: The Movie*, including VanderPyl who played Rosie, Mrs. Spacely and Spacely's secretary, Miss Galaxy. Among the missing were the original voices of Elroy and Judy Jetson. "They had to find somebody to do Elroy for the movie. They auditioned all kinds of people to imitate that voice, because Daws Butler, who played Huckleberry Hound, Yogi Bear and Elroy died.

"Daws was a wonderful man. He was also the original Beany of *Beany & Cecil*. That's how he started his career. He liked to train other actors from all over the country, and Patric Zimmerman, the person who got the Elroy part, was one of Daws' students. For Patric, it was a special role because he was imitating his teacher's voice."

VanderPyl is less enthusiastic about the situation regarding Judy. "Janet Waldo [Judy Jetson] was *replaced*. I think it was to pick up a younger audience, but she's completely devastated."

The role of Judy in *Jetsons: The Movie* was undertaken instead by Tiffany, who was originally scheduled to sing a few songs to accompany Waldo's dialogue. "She [Tiffany] wouldn't do the songs unless she could do the part, too. So, they *cut out* Janet, who had done Judy all these years. They dubbed in all of Judy's lines with Tiffany. To me, that's just heartbreaking. After all these years, it's just *not* the same. Especially when it's such a part of what people have grown up with."

Both a critical disappointment and a box office failure, *Jetsons: The Movie* (now on videocassette) stands as more

*(continued on page 74)*

# Betty Rubble's Lives

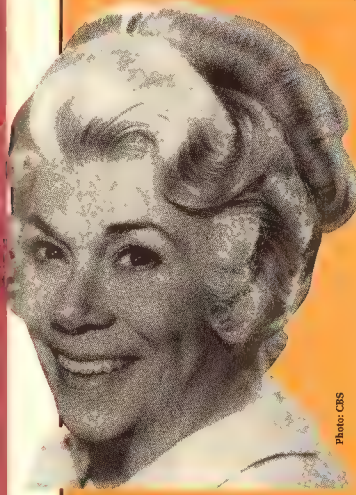


Photo: CBS

**Bea Benaderet first brought life to Betty Rubble.**

In many ways, Betty Rubble was like the actress who first portrayed her, Bea Benaderet ("Ben-a-DER-et").

"She was a wonderful lady. She would do anything for you. And she was tough. She didn't hesitate to speak her mind," Jean VanderPyl told COMICS SCENE's Kyle Counts for *The Hollywood Reporter*. "The chemistry between Wilma and Betty was there because Bea and I were just naturally close. I think it was the same kind of chemistry that Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz had."

Born in New York City in 1906, Benaderet later lived in San Francisco and moved to LA in 1936 to continue her career in radio, as a member of Orson Welles' troupe on *The Campbell Playhouse*. In 1938, she married James Bannon, an announcer who became cowboy star Red Ryder, but the couple eventually divorced.

Benaderet gained fame on radio's *The Jack Benny Program* in 1939 as Gertrude Gearshift, a telephone operator who spoke with a Brooklynese accent. Her radio career expanded as she performed on *My Friend Irma* as Amber Lipscott, *The Great Gildersleeve* as school principal/love interest Eve Goodwin, *Fibber McGee and Molly* as Mrs. Carstairs, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* as Gloria, the maid, and *The Penny Singleton Show* as Margaret the cook. She also performed regularly in *A Day in the Life of Dennis Day* and *The Burns and Allen Show* (both written by Paul Henning).

Her earliest cartoon voicework was for Warner Bros., beginning in the mid-1940s. Her roles included a saucy Red Riding Hood in "Little Red Riding Rabbit" and the narrator in "Scent-imental Over You." She also voiced Tweety's owner, Granny; was one of three actresses to voice Foghorn Leghorn's love interest, Miss Prissy; and played Mama Bear in the five Three Bears cartoons directed by Chuck Jones.

Of all the people Mel Blanc worked with, "I was probably the closest to Bea, if for no other reason than that we performed side by side so often in cartoons and on radio and TV," he said in his autobiography, *That's NOT All, Folks!* "I used to refer jokingly to her as the 'other woman' in my life."

From 1948-1951, Benaderet was heard on Lucille Ball's radio show, *My Favorite Husband*. She played Iris Atterbury, the wife of the short-tempered banker, Rudolph Atterbury, played by Gale Gordon. During summer 1950, Benaderet and Gordon played similar characters: Addle-brained Martha Granby and her bank clerk husband John, who left the city to live the country life in *Granby's Green Acres*. Years later, in 1965, the show's creator/writer/producer and director Jay Sommers brought the concept to television as *Green Acres*, starring Eva Gabor and Eddie Albert. Benaderet appeared in seven first-season episodes.

On October 12, 1950, the actress began her career on TV—and a lasting association with producer Al Simon—on *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show* on CBS. For eight years and 239 episodes, she played Blanche Morton, the Burns' neighbor (continuing the role from the radio version). When Gracie Allen retired in 1958, the series was revised to *The George Burns Show*, with Blanche becoming Burns' secretary. That program lasted less than a year, but Benaderet kept working with Simon on his next show, *Peter Loves Mary*. For 32 episodes, she played Wilma, the housekeeper to a showbiz couple.

Meanwhile, her friend VanderPyl introduced Benaderet to Joe Barbera. Both read the parts of Wilma Flintstone and her best friend, Betty Rubble—and Benaderet won the role of Betty. They also voiced many other females in *The Flintstones*' early years.

"There's no doubt that doing Betty Rubble brought added excitement to my life—mostly because of the excitement of those whom I know who feel such great excitement about it themselves," she said. "It's amazing how much interest there is in the series and how loyal people feel toward it and its characters. I'm very proud to be doing *The Flintstones*."

Then in 1962, Benaderet appeared in Simon's next series, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, created by Paul Henning. She had initially auditioned for Granny, but that role went to Irene Ryan. Henning kept Benaderet in the cast by creating Pearl Bodine, Jethro's mother and a first season regular.

Benaderet left *Hillbillies* to star in her own TV series, *Petticoat Junction*, also produced by Simon and created by Henning. From 1963 to 1968, she played widow Kate Bradley, owner of Hooterville's Shady Rest Hotel.

Bea Benaderet died of lung cancer on October 14, 1968 at age 62. Her second husband, Eugene Twombley, a veteran sound technician who worked with her on *The Jack Benny Program*, died three days later.

Gerry Johnson replaced Benaderet on *The Flintstones* in 1964, voicing Betty for the show's final three years in primetime. Previously, Johnson had hosted a LA morning talk show.

Then, in 1971, the Flintstones gang resurfaced on Saturday morning as *Pebbles and Bamm Bamm* on CBS. Gay Hartwig (who later changed her last name to Autterson) voiced Betty for the many Saturday morning versions. Hartwig also voiced Pebbles' friends Wiggy and Cindy.

Flintstones Art: Copyright 1985 Hanna-Barbera Productions, Inc.

**Other Bettys include Gerry Johnson, Gay Hartwig (later Autterson) and B.J. Ward.**

Betty's voice changed again in 1988, when B.J. Ward took the part in *The Flintstone Kids*, continuing with the two 1993 *Flintstones* TV movies, *I Yabba Dabba Do* and *Hollyrock-a-Bye Baby*. Ward, who appeared in *Matlock*, *Dallas* and *St. Elsewhere*, was a regular in *Working Girl*. Her numerous animated credits include *The Incredible Hulk*, *The Little Rascals*, Mrs. Brown in *Paddington Bear*, Casey in *The Snorks*, Erica Slade from *Sky Commanders* and Wonder Woman in the last two seasons of *Superfriends*.

—*Bob Miller*

# SOUL OF THE CL

## *The legendary Mel Blanc spoke in many tongues to several generations of animation fans.*

By BRIAN LOWRY

The name Mel Blanc has become synonymous with the craft of voice characterization. A maestro of the mouth, a virtuoso of the vocal chords, Blanc spent 50 years making us believe that a rabbit can sneer, a pig can stammer and a duck can make the moral judgment, "You're dethpicable."

And yet, for most of his career, Blanc was spared—or denied, as the case may be—the adulation of fans or the constant recognition of stardom. While many who spend their time in front of the camera end up craving that anonymity, it wasn't in Mel Blanc's nature to be aloof, cold or distant.

In fact, the man with the most famous voices in America once longed to provide his face some equal time.

"It used to bother me," as Blanc, who died in 1989, admitted in this interview conducted in 1986. "I could walk into a store and nobody knew who the hell I was. It made me feel bad, because I worked so hard to earn that recognition."

Blanc finally achieved widespread recognition in the late 1960s when he was among the first to do a "Do you know me?" American Express card commercial.

"That was the first time many people saw me," he recalled. "Now, when I walk into a store, they say, 'Hey, Mel, got your American Express card?' "

Residing in Beverly Hills in a mansion once owned by Bobby Darin, Blanc and his son Noel created a small empire called Blanc Communications Corp. Noel and a small staff managed the business, while Blanc kept the Warner Bros. crew of characters—including Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Elmer Fudd, Porky Pig, Yosemite Sam, Foghorn Leghorn, Pepe Le Pew, Sylvester the Cat and Tweety—alive with his ageless voice. On the side throughout the '70s and '80s, Blanc squeezed in dozens of personal appearances at colleges and many commercials.

Retirement, he said, was the furthest thing from his mind. Blanc hoped that Noel would succeed him after his death. "Noel can do exactly the same voices I can," Blanc said. "When he was 16, we took a car trip to Quebec. The road was very slick and I said [*in Porky Pig's voice*], 'This is the worst road I've ever driven!'

"And Noel answered back—in the same voice—'Obi-da, yep, I've never seen one worse.' "

Blanc believed the vocal talent is genetic, proven by the fact "that many other people have tried to copy me, and they don't even come close."

Despite those plans, however, Noel Blanc hasn't been the only one to voice his father's alter-egos since 1989.

**Mr. Benny will you *please* listen to your violin teacher! On *The Jack Benny Show*, Mel Blanc (left) comically pleaded with an exasperating pupil as Professor Le Blanc.**

Art: Fritz Freleng/Copyright 1990 Warner Bros.

Among those who have spoken as Blanc characters ranging from Bugs Bunny and Yosemite Sam to Barney Rubble and Mr. Spacely are Jeff Bergman, Greg Burson, Joe Alaskey, Chuck McCann, Maurice LeMarche, Frank Welker, Australian actor Keith Scott and Jim Cummings.

In 1950, Blanc tried to prove that his was not just an average set of pipes. Betty Grable had earned the moniker "million dollar legs" due to a much-publicized insurance policy, and Blanc decided his throat should be similarly covered.

"I went to Lloyd's of London, and they said they couldn't insure me unless there was something special about my throat," he said.

"So, I had it X-rayed. The doctor came out and said, 'That's the first time I ever saw the same muscular construction in a person's throat as Enrico Caruso had.' I said I couldn't sing like that, and he said, 'No, but you could completely lose your voice and gain it back within an hour.' "

Tragically, such insurance was necessary when, in early 1961, Blanc was involved in a head-on automobile collision. The accident resulted in the death of the other driver and left Blanc in a coma for 21 days with a triple-skull fracture. The happy ending, however, couldn't have been more remarkable if a screenwriter had actually dreamt it up.

"One doctor, a brain specialist, would come in every day and say, 'How are you, Mel?' I never answered him," Blanc recounted. "One day, with my wife and son in the room, he had a brilliant idea: He said, 'Hey, Bugs Bunny, how are you?' I said [*in Bugs' voice*], 'Just fine, Doc. How are you?' He turned to my wife and said, 'He's going to be all right.'

"After that, he would say hello to a different character each day, and I always answered him in that voice. That went on for 10 days.

"When I came out of the coma, I had no memory of it. The doctor said that I thought I was dead, but my characters were *still* alive."

In a way, of course, Blanc's characters do take on lives of their own. One reason was that Blanc, unlike many other voice-men, never resorted to impersonations.

"For every character I do, I try to *create* the voice for them," he explained. "I was shown a picture of Bugs Bunny and told he was a tough little stinker. I thought, 'What's the toughest [dialect] in this country? Brooklyn and the Bronx.' So, I put the two together. I don't impersonate at all, although I can. To me, that's like stealing from somebody."

A classic case, Blanc recalled, was *The Flintstones*—the Hanna-Barbera primetime cartoon that emulated *The Honeymooners*, prehistoric style. "They wanted me to imitate Art Carney for the Barney Rubble voice," Blanc revealed. "I said, 'No. I won't imitate him. I'll give you similar characteristics, but I *won't* use his voice.' "

Blanc settled on a voice that was low and somewhat nasal, like Ed Norton's, but with a unique laugh, "a silly hiccup," at the end of each sentence.

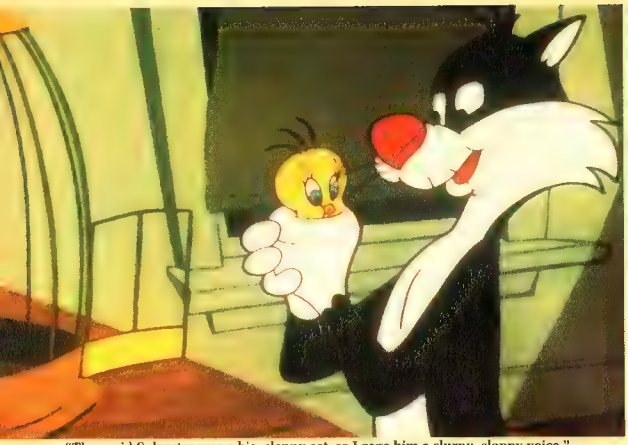
All Looney Tunes/Merrie Melodies Characters & Art: Copyright 1984, 1994 Warner Bros.

**With a fat friar and a feathered Robin, Porky Pig, Daffy Duck and Blanc laughed their way all over Sherwood Forest looking for buck-and-a-quarter quarterstaffs.**

**North winds blow! Hurricane! *SMOG*! In the Oscar-winning, Chuck Jones-directed "What's Opera Doc?" Blanc sang Bugs Bunny Wagnerian style. Later, after originator Arthur Q. Bryan's death, Blanc would play Elmer Fudd, too.**

Selected Art: Courtesy Warner Home Video

ASSIC CARTOON



**"They said Sylvester was a big, sloppy cat, so I gave him a slurpy, sloppy voice," recalled Blanc (who also did Tweety). "The voice establishes the character."**

"They accepted it immediately."

*The Flintstones* was a special favorite of Blanc's. As he related in his autobiography *That's Not All Folks!* (written with Philip Bashe), its "success was due in part to its sheer novelty: rarely had cartoons been written for and about adults. *The Flintstones* was a playful satire on suburban life, albeit in a prehistoric setting. The Flintstones and the Rubbles reflected mid-20th-century viewers' experiences and problems back at them: having to contend with 'modern-day' pressures while at the same time enjoying 'modern-day' conveniences.

"Through humor, *The Flintstones* pointed up how the basic travails of mankind hadn't really changed all that much. In an increasingly tense world threatened by the so-called Cold War and the prospect of nuclear annihilation, it was good to be able to laugh at ourselves.

"And at the characters, who were remarkably lifelike and believable. Credit that to a talented cast: Alan Reed as Fred, Jean VanderPyl as Wilma and my dear friend Bea Benaderet as Betty Rubble. In addition to voicing her husband, Barney, I was called on to play Dino, the Flintstones' incessantly yapping pet dinosaur and a dozen years later on *The Flintstones Comedy Hour*, two supporting characters, Zonk and Stub."

Among Blanc's many voices for Hanna-Barbera were Colony Zachary Gator (a voice similar to Foghorn Leghorn) in *Wally Gator*; Hardy Har Har, pessimistic hyena pal to *Lippy the Lion*; Cosmo Spacely, the loud-

**"Compared to today, there is no 'violence' in any cartoon I've ever made," Blanc maintained. Somebody tell that to Yosemite Sam—politely.**

## Barney's Voices

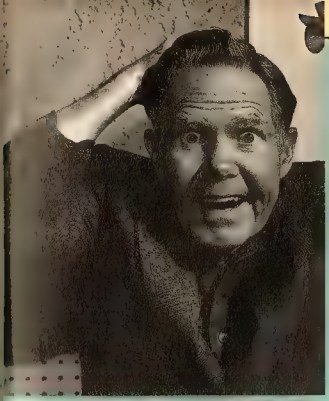
When Barney Rubble spoke for the first time, it was with the voice of Daws Butler. Yes, the same man who performed Huckleberry Hound, Quick Draw McGraw and Snagglepuss. In fact, Butler was appropriate for the role, because he could vocally imitate Art Carney's Ed Norton character from *The Honeymooners*. He did it in the Looney Tunes *Honey-mousers* series (as "Ned Morton"); Butler gave Norton mannerisms to his earliest characterization of Yogi Bear; he could do the same for a Stone Age Norton.

Originally, *The Flintstones* were *The Flagstones* when co-creator Joe Barbera pitched the idea to potential sponsors. He produced a 90-second presentation clip with Butler voicing both Barney and Fred, June Foray as Betty and Jean VanderPyl as Wilma. When the series was sold and the name changed to *The Flintstones* to avoid conflict with the Flagstons from Mort Walker's *Hi and Lois* comic strip, Bill Hanna and Barbera decided to hire Mel Blanc to voice Barney.

However, Butler returned to the role when Blanc suffered his automobile accident in January 1961. Butler voiced Barney for several episodes until Blanc recovered, and then Blanc looped over Butler's lines. However, some first season episodes—such as "Fred Flintstone Woos Again"—*still* have Butler speaking for Barney.

Charles Dawson Butler grew up in Oak Park, Illinois, where he performed in night clubs as an impressionist. After Butler served in the Navy during WW II, his family moved to Southern California, where he met Warner Bros. director Bob Clampett. In 1948, Clampett cast Butler in a puppet show, in the role of a little boy whose friend is a sea serpent named Cecil. The show, *Time for Beany*, ran daily for five years. Butler entered the cartoon field when director Tex Avery hired him at MGM. There, the actor voiced characters on the *Tom and Jerry* series for directors Hanna and Barbera. When Hanna-Barbera formed their own TV studio in 1957, they used Butler as Ruff in their first cartoon, *Ruff and Reddy*. From there, Butler would voice many memorable characters for the studio, including Augie Doggie, Lippy the Lion, Elroy Jetson, Mr. Cogswell, Baba Looey, Wally Gator and the Funky Phantom. Profiled in STARLOG #116, Butler also voiced Cap'n Crunch and various characters for Jay Ward. Snagglepuss was his favorite voice. Butler died in 1988 at age 71.

Blanc continued as Barney, Dino and some of the animals the Flintstones used as appliances throughout the series and its many spinoffs until his death in 1989. For *The Flintstone Kids*, which juniorized the cast in



**The first man to ever put words in the mouth of the stubby Bedrocker was Daws Butler for the 90-second short, *The Flagstones*.**

**Since the death of Blanc, Frank Welker (pictured) has put the bounce in Barney's voice—along with Joe Alaskey and Jeff Bergman.**

**Barney Rubble, the quintessential next door neighbor and best buddy to "Big Fred," has had many a talented alter-ego—most notably, Mel Blanc.**

1986, Blanc voiced Barney's father, Robert Rubble, while the pint-sized Barney was voiced by Hamilton Camp.

Born in England, Camp attended Hollywood High School during the 1950s and began acting in films and TV. He entered the folk music scene in New York, teamed with singer Bob Gibson in Chicago, worked with the Second City improv theater group and the San Francisco comedy troupe, the Committee. In 1973, he sang and did commercial work, including the voice of the Lucky Charms leprechaun. Then, he moved back to Los Angeles, to act in such films as *Heaven Can Wait* (as one of the servants), *The Jerk*, *American Hot Wax* and *Evilspeak*, and TV series like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Laverne & Shirley*, *M*A*S*H*, *Soap*, *Three's Company* and *WKRP in Cincinnati*. His cartoon voice work includes Harmony and Greedy Smurf, Mr. Microchips and Manny for *Rockin' with Judy Jetson*, Dracula in *Scooby and the Reluctant Werewolf* and Mr. Gruber in *Paddington Bear*.

For Post Cereals' Fruity and Cocoa Pebbles, Barney has been voiced by Joe Alaskey and Jeff Bergman.

Alaskey is a comedian, who has appeared in the syndicated TV series *Out of This World* and such films as *Lucky Stiff*. His cartoon voice credits include Daffy Duck and Sylvester for Six Flags Theme Parks, Boris Badenov in recent Taco Bell ads, the Lobster Mobster in Disney's *Little Mermaid* and Flaps the Elephant in *Bonkers*, but he's probably best known as Plucky Duck in *Tiny Toon Adventures*. He'll be appearing as Stinkie in the *Casper* movie.

Director Greg Ford discovered New York native Jeff Bergman and cast him to voice the Looney Tunes characters, first involving ADR work, then re-creating some of the voices for *Tiny Toon Adventures*, *Invasion of the Bunny Snatchers*, *Bugs Bunny's Lunar Tunes* and the still-unreleased *Blooper Bunny*. After the deaths of George O'Hanlon and Mel Blanc, Bergman (CS #33) voiced new dialogue for both George Jetson and Mr. Spacely in *Jetsons: The Movie*. He has also done Charlie the Tuna for Starkist and Popeye for Quaker Oats.

Frank Welker currently voices Barney and Dino for the *Flintstones* TV specials, but oddly, not for Pebbles Cereal.

"I've never done any but I got close, evidently on the auditions. It's funny that the ad company—the people who do the cereal—are not in concert with the people who do the shows, but," Welker says good-naturedly, "I guess it's nice to have three or four Barneys working. All of the Barneys that I've heard have been really good."

Born in Colorado, he began his career as a standup comedian, impressionist and live-action actor, but segued to cartoon voice work as Freddie Jones on *Scooby Doo, Where are You!* in 1969. Ultimately, he would voice such characters as Jabberjaw, Dynomutt, Slimer, Baby Kermit and Baby Skeeter, Furrball and Gogo Dodo, Itsy-Bitsy Spider, *Animaniacs*' Runt, Buttons and Flavio, *Cro*'s Earle Mammoth and Bobb, *Aladdin*'s Abu and Cave of Wonders and countless others. His talent for reproducing animal sounds led to doing vocal FX in live-action movies such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (the treacherous spider monkey), *Gremlins* and its sequel, *Star Trek III* (Young Spock, the Klingon dog), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II* and Darwin the Dolphin in *seaQuest*.

Welker was involved with the *Flintstones* primetime specials in the 1980s, voicing incidental characters, and Dino as well.

"Mel was getting older and it was tough for him to do Dino," Welker recalls. "So, Joe [Barbera] said, 'Well, maybe Frank can help you out on that.' Mel said, 'Hey, that would be great.' So, I did a couple of Dinos and Mel said, 'All right, yeah.' It was such an honor for him to ask me to do Dino."

After Blanc died, Welker acquired the roles of Barney and Dino, which he performed for the 1993 TV special, *I Yabba Dabba Do!*, followed by *Hollyrock-a-Bye Baby* and *A Flintstone Family Christmas*.

To re-create Barney's voice, Welker listens carefully to the classic episodes. "It's perfect homework," he says. "I get to watch the old shows.

"What I've been trying to do is keep as true to Mel as I possibly can, and try and re-create that voice. But eventually what happens is, a little bit of you is going to get into the character. But I try to get as close to what Mel was doing as I can. It's a great voice.

"In the back of my mind, I'm going, 'Hey, Mel, this is yours. I'm just borrowing it, and I appreciate the shot.'

Says Welker candidly, "You're keeping something he created alive, and you hope you do it justice."

—*Bob Miller*

Design & Layout: Vera Naughton

All Flintstones, Captain Caveman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Hanna-Barbera Prod. Inc.

mouthed boss in *The Jetsons*; Droop-a-long, Ricochet Rabbit's drawling deputy on *The Magilla Gorilla Show*; Braxton Bear in *Loopy de Loop*; Sneezly Seal on *The Peter Potamus Show*; Secret Squirrel; Salty the Parrot, friend to *Sinbad Jr. the Sailor*; the Bully Brothers and Yak Yak on *Perils of Penelope Pitstop*; Bubba McCoy, teammate to Ed Huddles in *Where's Huddles?*; Captain Caveman (and his alter-ego) and Quack-Up, sidekick to Huckleberry Hound on *Yogi's Space Race*. For Ruby-Spears and DIC, Blanc voiced Heathcliff the cat, Spike, Muggsy and others.

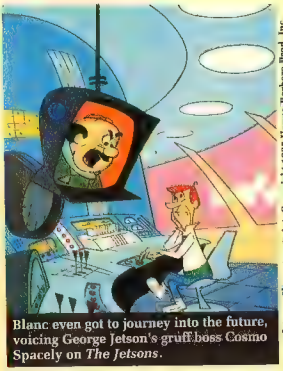
way," he noted, "and they came to me and said they couldn't understand what the hell I was saying. I told them, 'You cut down on the teeth, and I'll cut down on the speech.' They did."

For his first regular character, Porky Pig, Blanc said he went out to a farm and wallowed around with pigs for several hours. "The first thing they said when I got back was to take a shower," he laughed. "A fine thing for a nice Jewish boy to do."

And the result was Porky's stammering delivery, since Blanc decided "if a pig could talk, he would talk with a grunt." While the character's look

**Blanc was a legend in the voice artist arena, and asked to bring to life countless characters, including Hanna-Barbera's Captain Caveman.**

**"Through humor, *The Flintstones* pointed out how the basic travails of mankind hadn't changed that much," said Blanc, who voiced both Barney and Dino.**



**Blanc even got to journey into the future, voicing George Jetson's gruff boss Cosmo Spacely on *The Jetsons*.**

Jetsons Characters & Art Copyright 1985 Hanna-Barbera Prod. Inc.

**...And Twiki, the robot pal and constant complainer on *Buck Rogers*. Blanc convinced the producers to add a voice for Twiki, as opposed to silly sounds.**

Buck Rogers Photo: Herb Ball/Copyright 1979 Universal City Studios Inc.

Almost every characterization Blanc ever submitted was accepted by Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng and the Warner Bros. producers. He attributes that to the fact that he carefully researched every voice he did, trying to create a blend between the animal involved and the character's personality.

Blanc could only remember one instance in which one of his voices was rejected. The first talking Bugs Bunny cartoon depicted the character "with his front teeth *way* out, so I wanted to indicate that.' "

The voice Blanc developed, consequently, sounded much like Bugs' present voice, but with a slurring, lisping sound representing his tongue thrusting off those protruding incisors.

"We did the first two cartoons that has evolved over the years, the voice remained substantially the same.

"The cartoons made the characters cuter, but I never changed the voices," he observed. "They said Sylvester was a big, sloppy cat, so I gave him a slurpy, sloppy voice. The voice establishes the character. When you watch the old cartoons, Bugs looks different, but close your eyes and he sounds the same as he did 30 years later."

Born in 1908, Blanc realized his affinity for voices at an early age. In school, he would entertain at assemblies. "The kids would all laugh," he recalled. "The teachers would laugh too, and then give me lousy grades."

Later, Blanc wrote and produced his own local radio show before graduating to national broadcasts. He soon became a fixture of *The Jack Benny Show* during the '30s and '40s in addition to performing with Abbott & Costello, Burns & Allen and others.

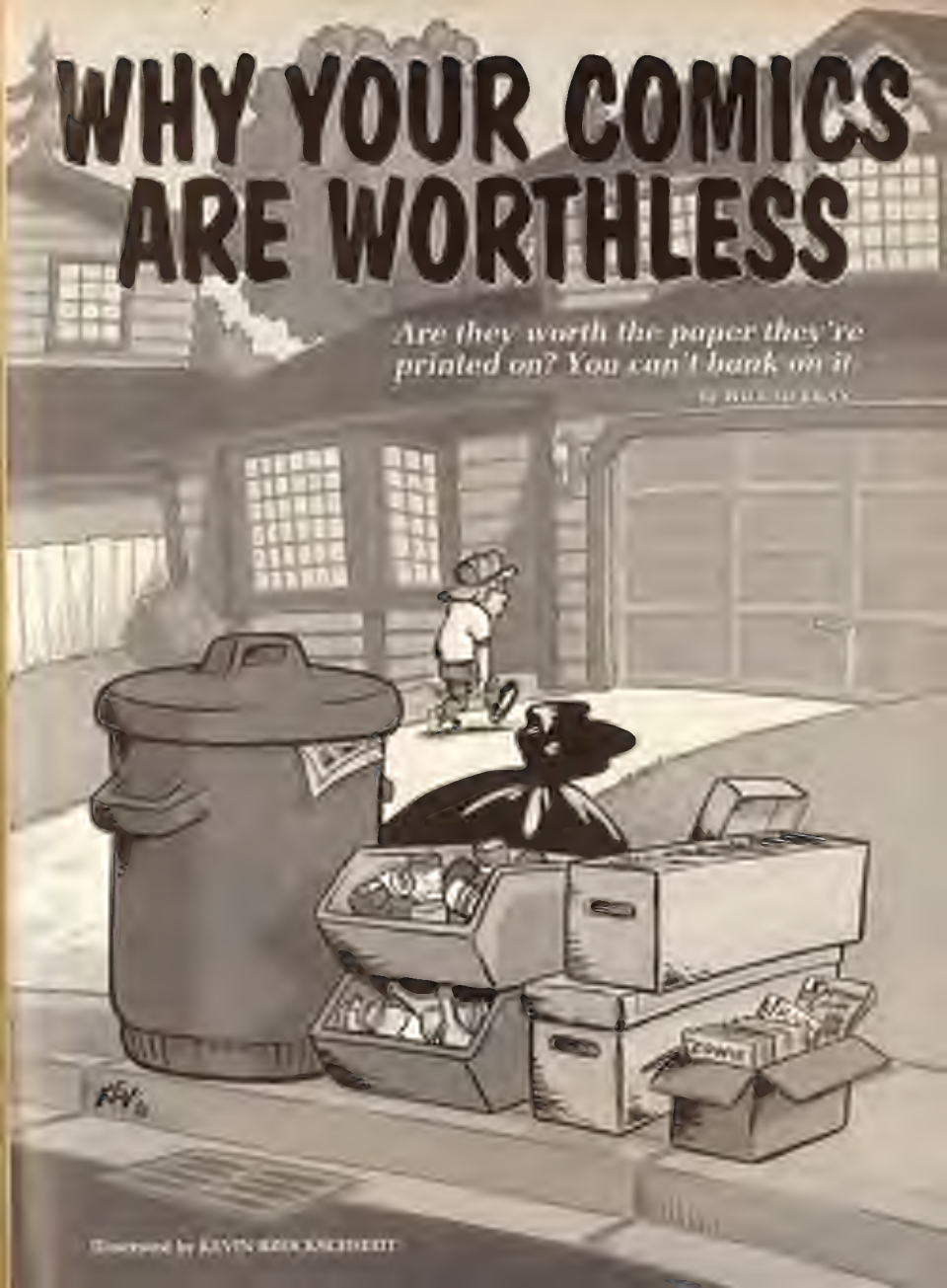
About the same time that Blanc started to make waves in radio, he auditioned for Warner Bros. and was flatly rejected. " 'We have all the

*(continued on page 82)*

# WHY YOUR COMICS ARE WORTHLESS

*Are they worth the paper they're printed on? You can't bank on it*

by BILL GRAY




Illustrated by KEVIN REED KACHELHOFFER

Your comic book collection may be virtually worthless—and there's *nothing* you can do about it!

Absurd? Preposterous? Impossible? Then consider these facts:

The comic book is 60 years old this decade. For 40 of those years, comic book back issues were almost universally considered to be worth less money—usually half the cover price—than brand new issues. That's right. Half the "value" evaporates once it goes off sale. This was true right up into the mid-1960s, when the first comics dealers began issuing lists, and continued to be true far into the 1970s for the average fan and retailer.

Well, you say, that was then and this is now. This is the 1990s. Things are different, and people have wised up to the true value of comic books. Ask any dealer of older comics. The days of being able to score a nice Golden or Silver Age collection some little old lady discovered in her attic are virtually over. Thanks to media coverage, *everybody* knows old comics are worth *serious* bucks.

You must only go back to the late 1980s for the most recent time when comics collectors—speculators really—woke up one morning to discover that their bagged and backed multiple copies of *Superhot Comics* #1 had evaporated in value virtually overnight. Melted down to below cover price, even *below* the wholesale price they paid for it! To understand how it could happen to you, let's first establish the basics of comic book values.

They are, in the absolute sense, completely meaningless.

Shocked?

There is no absolutely irreducible, rock bottom value to *any* comic book. It's all consensual, a social pact. Because there is an "official" price guide, and most everyone agrees with the *Price Guide*'s figures, its prices—and remember, they're only guidelines—are universally accepted. Should this mutual consent ever falter, should faith in those guidelines collapse, those prices will go into freefall.

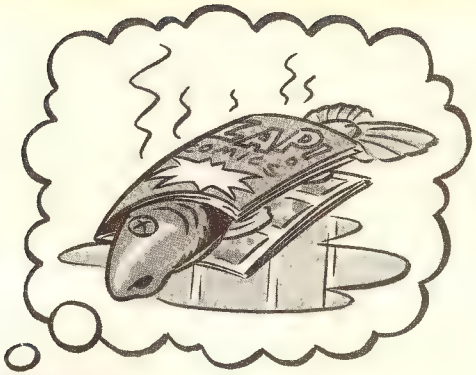
Doubt it? Try an experiment. Go out on the street and accost someone who doesn't collect comics, and has no solid idea of comic book values. Offer him the most valuable comic book in your collection at one-tenth *Guide*.

Nine out of 10 people will refuse you. Sure, some may balk because they think you're trying to pull a fast one, but the true reason most people will pass up such an astounding "bargain" is simple: The comic book has no obvious intrinsic value—to them, it's just a comic book. Something to read and throw away, if that.

On the other hand, if you were offering a wristwatch at a good price, you would have many more takers. Why? Even if Joe Average doesn't need a new watch, he understands that a watch has value and utility, and most people won't pass up a good bargain.

There are many people out there who couldn't care less about comics, valuable or otherwise, and they outnumber those who do. This means that more people will either shake their heads in wonderment, or laugh those same heads off when you proudly show off your pristine mint *Spawn* #1 and boast of its current book value, than those who'll envy you on your wise "investment."

Even among professional comics dealers, there is disagreement about comics values. I know Golden Age dealers who hold the entire Silver Age market in utter contempt, believing that only Golden Age books are truly



rare enough to command serious money. I also know Silver Age dealers who consider the current feeding frenzy for *X-Men*, Image and Valiant comics ridiculous. These comics are already being hoarded in huge numbers for later resale. Where are the future purchasers?

And there are those who believe that the only real money to be made in comics these days, when every little old lady assumes the copy of *Heckle and Jeckle* #1 she discovered rolled up in her eaves must be worth a bundle, is to buy new comics at wholesale and sell them above cover price.

Who's right and who's wrong?

One of the deepest, darkest secrets of the comics field is that many of the most expensive titles on the market pass from dealer to dealer in complicated cash-and-book trades. These are the older books, primarily Golden Agers, but Silver Age titles move this way, too. And official *Overstreet Price Guide* prices are often based on these dealer-to-dealer trades.

Many more expensive comics than you might think have assigned values based on being sold once at a certain price—or merely being offered at that price. And just because one person was willing to pay $6,000 for *Red Raven Comics* #1, for example, doesn't mean there are *any* others who crave it *that* much.

George Santayana said, "Those who do not study history are condemned to repeat it." The entire pricing system for comics could burst like a bubble—just like the Netherlands' tulipmania of the 1630s, when the Dutch drove up tulip bulb prices in a frenzy of speculation to the point where certain bulbs were worth their weight in gold. One speculator actually sold his *house* in order to buy *one* tulip bulb. Until someone jumped up and said, "Hey, they're only seeds!" One sane voice—and the market collapsed utterly.

The Dutch had a word for such commercial insanity: *windhandel*—"trading in the wind."

But tulip bulbs aren't comics, you say. True—so let's use a more appropriate example. You don't remember the dime novel, your father probably doesn't remember the dime novel, but his grandfather certainly would. They flourished at the end of the last century, and were that era's equivalent of the comic book. They featured heroes like Nick Carter, Frank Merriwell, Buffalo Bill and Jesse James.

Dime novels died out early in the 20th century, but they experienced a revival in the Roaring '20s. Adults, growing nostalgic for their childhoods—as adults invariably do with the onset of middle age—began seeking them out in an effort to recapture their far-off youth. Since they were considered trashy, disposable reading, few had saved their copies. Dime novels were hard to find. Demand outpaced supply, and soon they were selling for *real* money.

People started publishing fanzines. *The Dime Novel Roundup*, launched in 1925, continues to this day. By the 1940s, dime novel prices were peaking to about $4 or $5 for most titles—and considerably higher for special items. Doesn't sound like much? In those days, it was unheard of. And $5 back then equates to about $50 today.

Dime novel collecting flourished for three decades. But in the 1950s, it collapsed. Why? The generation that had grown up collecting dime novels began to die off, and there were very few younger people who were interested—not nearly enough to support 1940s prices. Without the continued demand by newcomers, scarcity and supply became irrelevant.

Today, dime novels are scarcer than ever. But when you can find them, they can be had for $4 to $5—exactly their 1940s prices! Allowing for inflation, the actual value of dime novels had fallen by more than a factor of 10! Just like tulip bulbs. Except that when you plant tulip bulbs, you get a return in tulips.

It can't happen to comics, I hear you mutter. There's too much money invested—the stakes are too high. Well, the stakes are much higher in the very speculative stock market—and it's crashed *several* times this century. And let's not forget that stock prices are *regulated*. Prices may fluctuate, but if Marvel Entertainment stock is trading at $28 a share on Monday, that's the price you pay. Comic books exchange hands every day for prices above and below *Guide*. It's neither a buyer's nor a seller's market.

Should there be a major price correction, forcing *Overstreet* to retreat on prices, make no mistake: It could be the end of *Overstreet*—and investing in comics. The *Price Guide* sells tons of copies every year only because investors, dealers and collectors alike are hot to see how much their stash has appreciated over the prior 12

months. When prices fall, the pyramid will collapse, just as it has in sports cards and real estate.

Don't kid yourself. It *can* happen in comics. Because it has before.

You needn't go back more than six years to see the future of the speculation frenzy that's now in full swing. It was called the Great Black & White Implosion, and it detonated in summer 1987. It devastated countless dealers, writers, artists and publishers.

I know; I had a ringside seat for the carnage. Like many, I was oblivious to the gathering storm. In those days, I was running comic book conventions in Boston. It's not hard to set up a comics con. You rent hotel space, advertise and the fans will come; out of curiosity the first time, and every time thereafter if you put on a good show.

The trick is to get the dealers. At the time I launched my show in January 1986, Boston had been bereft of a monthly con for more than two years. Area fans were starved, and dealers were more than happy to pour in from virtually every New England state, and even as far away as Florida and Toronto. I had a waiting list of dealers eager to do my show.

I didn't know it, but my show was built on a foundation of high-risk speculation. I didn't know it because I didn't set up at my own shows. I wasn't a dealer, I was a writer moonlighting as a convention promoter.

The first year was very profitable. The second started off that way. At that time, the hot comics were *X-Men*, *G.I. Joe*, *Daredevil*, *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen* and an incredible profusion of black & white titles produced by a growing army of independent publishers. Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* had burst on the scene two years before. They were hot, licensed and on their way to becoming multi-millionaires, because they were talented enough to create a unique concept, brave enough to publish it themselves and smart enough to promote it intelligently. The rest followed so fast it was scary—but inspiring.

Everyone with a few thousand dollars and the yen to publish their own comic thought they were going to be the next Eastman and Laird. And the titles poured forth. *Adolescent Radioactive Black Belt Hamsters*, *Fish Police*, *Gnatrat*. Investors had no way to tell which title might be the next *TMNT*, so they bought multiple copies of *everything* in sight. At the peak of the glut, an avalanche of unreadable crud poured forth.

Reasoning behind the speculation frenzy was simple. Independent print runs were very small, so titles were scarce. If you bought them when they came out, you could turn them around within weeks for some multiple of the cover price to the poor fanboys who had missed that issue. And many dealers did. It was a low-cost way to get into comics speculation for those who couldn't afford to invest in vintage Marvels, and then wait for them to appreciate.

The problem with this logic was simple. Print runs were low because orders—even inflated by frenzied speculation—were low. And too many copies of those low runs were going to hoarders. If there weren't enough readers to support *Elflord's* early issues, there was no way readership could be built up and demand increase.

Overnight, the fever broke. I found this out when I began calling my dealers looking to rent them tables in the aftermath of the summer 1987 glut. They begged off in droves. The comics they were hoarding were the comics most of their competition hoarded, too. Fans, upset at being frozen out of the ground floor of new titles, refused to pay triple cover price for a week-old issue of a cheap, fanzine-quality title. The rack glut became a dealer glut.

The bubble bursting, dealers dumped their stocks, but to no avail. There were no readers for many of these books. Stores with too much cap-

ital tied up in unwanted books folded, undercapitalized dealers went out of business. Companies too. I shut down my show after limping through a lackluster 1988. I can still remember one dealer plaintively telling me that he was storing his multiple copies in his basement until the market returned.

He's still waiting.

Virtually no comic book published specifically to cash in on the black & white craze that appreciated in value in the short term has held onto that value today—a mere six years later. Yet some are quite scarce now. You can't find them in comic shops or at conventions, and there's a good reason for that: No one wants them. Thus, they're worth less than the mylar bags that protect their "value."

If it happened to 1987 speculators who were stockpiling books destined by their very print runs to be scarce, it will surely happen to the people sitting on a tiny fraction of the six-figure print runs of today's ultra-hot comics. Count on it.

So, what makes a comic book valuable? That depends on the comic, who published it and when. And most importantly, who *wants* it.

The very earliest comics, those published before 1945, are quite hard to find. Even those which had large print runs. Why? Simple. During World War II, paper drives collected huge quantities of these crude gems and mulched them into other products. This is why some Golden Age dealers scoff at the "scarcity" of Silver Age comics. No voracious paper drives swallowed 90 percent of the original *Amazing Spider-Man* runs.

Comics that feature characters still published or remembered today are valuable, because new readers come along every year and want to read or own the older issues. Collectors make that market, just as they did with dime novels and tulip bulbs.

There are many Golden Age comics that have book values, but which almost no one wants. If someone offered you a *Blazing Comics* #1 featuring the origin of the Green Turtle at one quarter *Guide*, would you still be willing to shell out $50 for it? Not unless you had a customer eager to buy it from you at full *Guide*.

Yet there are Golden Age books that have great historical value. *Action* #1. *Detective* #39. *Marvel Comics* #1. *Captain America* #1. These will undoubtedly be worth something even if the collectors' market vanishes. Why? Because universities—today the only still active market for the few surviving dime novel dealers—will probably start acquiring them as historical pieces of Americana. Trouble is, universities *don't pay* collectors' prices.

A combination of scarcity, demand and condition makes a comic worth significant money. Generally, comics published before 1970 (the year the Silver Age of Comics is generally supposed to have ended) are more valuable than those published afterward. That's not because they're older, but due to the fact that by 1970, collectors and casual readers stopped throwing out their comics.

Even so, the average run-of-the-mill Silver Age comic is today only worth about six bucks, according to the dealers I polled. Not a bad return on a 10 or 12-cent investment? Think again. Due to inflation, the 12-cent comic today costs about $1.25. And that's a 10 percent inflationary markup. If you bought a comic for 12 cents in 1963 and it's now worth $6, your profit—in real buying power—is actually (take your pick) $4.75 or a cool 48 1963 cents, less than a movie ticket. And if you invested more than cover price and the cost of a mylar bag and backing board, it's closer to the price of a can of Dr. Pepper. Big profit, right?

An awful lot of Silver Age comics haven't appreciated very much in buying power in the last 30 years. And those that have? Well, try getting *Overstreet* prices from your average dealer or comic shop owner. If it's desirable, you would be lucky to get a third to half *Guide*. (That *really* eats into your 48-cent profit margin!) And if it's a post-1970 book, typically, you'll be offered about 10 cents on the dollar! You would be *losing* money!

Why so little?

Among dealers there is an axiom that, with rare exceptions, most post-1970 comic books have an actual *worth* of 10 cents.

Feeling queasy? You'd better sit down, it gets worse.

Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

Comics published after 1970 are very common. Thanks to the introduction of the plastic bag, they tend to survive in better condition than older comics. And if there's anything that is guaranteed to insure modern comics won't go up in value much, it's the plastic bag. Early Marvels, common as they are, command serious prices only when found in very fine or mint condition. Mint Marvels from the '60s are still at a premium. That, as much as scarcity and demand, explains their current pricing.

Titles published before 1970 are being collected today by two types of people. The collectors—those who pick up a recent *Fantastic Four* and are seized by the compulsion to collect *every* issue going back to 1961; and by recollectors—those who seek comics they owned as children but lost along the way.

In the brief history of comics collecting, the most important economic force is not the collector, or the speculator/investor, but the recollector. He's usually middle-aged, has money and is driven by the powerful yearning called nostalgia. He ultimately establishes the price guide prices by what he's willing to shell out to recapture his childhood.

Two fundamental urges drive comics collecting—as it does any collectibles market: greed and nostalgia. Of the two, nostalgia is the most powerful. And nostalgia, not any true and dependable value, determines comic book values.

If you put a *Fantastic Four* #4 up for auction, it's the 40-year-old recollectors who will outbid the 20-year-old collectors every time. They have the money to start with, and when the price begins to reach for the stratosphere, the collector invariably drops out—the recollector wants it more. Having had it once, he must have it again—it's a fever. And he can justify paying a premium because, let's face it, this is his *childhood* he's fighting to recapture. Chances are, he's never going to sell that 1962 gem anyway, so he won't feel too bad if, down the road, the price drops. His investment is in his happiness, not his portfolio.

On the other hand, the investor/speculator is in it for the money. The exact minute that speculation stops being profitable, he liquidates and moves on. And the speculator usually gets burned. Why? Because like a moth drawn to consuming flame, he inevitably sinks the bulk of his money into multiple copies of new titles. You can't go around buying up scads of 30-year-old *Fantastic Fours*, and sit back to wait the year or two it takes for the price to rise sharply. As for the casual reader, why buy pricey back issues just to read? Give him a Marvel Masterworks or a DC Archives and he'll be just as happy.

As near as anyone can recall, speculation in newsstand comics began in 1970, when Jack Kirby left Marvel for DC and started his Fourth World books. It was the first post-Silver Age event, and it was a bust. Today, *The News Gods*, *The Forever People* and *Mr. Miracle* are cheap, plentiful—and largely unwanted.

The first instance of major speculation in new comics took place in 1973, with the long-awaited return of the original Captain Marvel in DC's *Shazam* #1. Fans had dreamed of the Big Red Cheese's resurrection for two decades. Due to legal problems, for a long time it was the Impossible Dream. His originator, C.C. Beck, was going to do the book. It was like Steve Ditko returning to draw Spider-Man—expectations were high. So were orders, in those fledgling days of the direct market. An estimated one million copies were printed.

When *Shazam* #1 came out, everyone who caught the fever bought multiple copies, some even intercepting entire shipments before they reached the stands, certain that it was going to be extremely valuable by, say, 1993.

Well, 1993 has arrived —and if you want a *Shazam* #1, you only have to look in the dollar boxes. So many copies were hoarded in mint condition that it's impossible for their value to amount to anything.

*(continued on page 54)*

## *Armored with sentient liquid super-suits, Whilce Portacio unleashes*

# WETWORKS

I'm telling people to imagine Arnold Schwarzenegger's gang from *Predator* coated in *T2*-like living armor," says writer/artist Whilce Portacio of his new Image title, *Wetworks*.

This action/adventure series, which takes its name from a special operations term for special missions involving combat, follows a paramilitary team working for a CIA-style organization called The Company. Their superior combat abilities become superhuman when they don nearly indestructible suits of living metal armor. From there on, however, things get strange.

"The mini-series deals solely with their origins," Portacio says. "They reach what is technically superhero status—becoming powerful enough to take on super-villains and other superheroes; how they use the suits and become near-invulnerable is part of it. The suits are semi-sentient life forms. They form a symbiotic relationship with their 'hosts,' which has dramatic effects on the team members.

"As things roll on, from the glimpses in the mini-series, the Wetworks characters begin changing, inside and out. They start developing, evolving, into something other than what they were. Some of them take to it happily, some are forced to accept it and some break under the strain. By the end, we'll have a new Wetworks team that's more traditionally superheroic and less special ops [operations] than when they started."

The Wetworks team consists of four squads. There are two Strike Teams, combining one each of heavy and light infantry. Team One pairs Dozer (heavy infantry) with Grail (light infantry), while heavy infantryman Claymore works with Jester on Team Two.

"Dozer is an amiable kind of guy; competitive, but not aggressive," notes Portacio. "He's the Jesse Ventura character from *Predator*—he carries a gatling cannon in each hand and is up for just about any challenge. He likes playing and never takes anything seriously, which might cause some problems with his personal relationships.

"Claymore straps landmines to his legs before getting really up-close to his opponents. In close quarters, he'll let them go off! And his partner, Jester, is even crazier."

Reconnaissance chores fall to Pilgrim, the one-woman epitome of "seek and destroy." "Her modus operandi is to sneak in and explode out. The best way to find out where she has been is to track the explosions, and the dead bodies."

Dane, the leader, is part of the two-person Command sub-group with communications expert/cyborg Mother. "Dane is my take on John Wayne," Portacio says. "He grew up to be a soldier—he lives and breathes it. Inherent in that is the fact that Dane is very idealistic. His whole life is dedicated to serving and protecting, but he has never been invulnerable—he's only human. Until now. He's now in a situation where he may even be immortal and can become the ultimate protector, not only of his own family and friends, but of the world itself. Dane may start believing his own hype, which is usually bad for anybody."

The inclusion of Mother, however, causes more immediate problems. "Mother is a cyborg, the only person who hasn't been with the team since the beginning," he says. "In fact, she joins in the first issue, and some of the team doesn't like having a cyborg with them. There's some anti-cyborg prejudice. She handles communications, so she has to be responsible for them, even though they don't like her—it's a tough job. And Dane's challenge is to hold this team together."

Their mysterious adversaries complicate an already difficult situation. According to Portacio, a vampiric race pushes the Wetworks team to their limits, and things grow worse when a sub-race of biogenetically-enhanced vampires challenge them. The vampires are an ongoing enemy, with subtle but significant ties to the team's formation.

From the beginning, Wetworks will

be fighting this race, which has been living underground for thousands of years, led by a caste or offshoot race that's practically immortal. One of them—who becomes a major nemesis for the team—tries to make Dane into an ultimate fighting machine, just as a personal challenge. It's a situation that escalates into a battle of titans, of immortal enemies.

"I'm thinking of having one or two superhero teams take on Wetworks, because they'll go rogue after the miniseries," he says. "Youngblood or another group could easily get involved in trying to round them up, especially since the Company will be after them. The ideal conclusion, to me, is to have Wetworks and other groups realize that they're a match for each other, which gives Wetworks a ranking among the superhero groups around."

Crossovers are slightly problematical at this point because, as Portacio points out, *every* Image character is owned and handled by its creator. As a result, there hasn't been any definitive ranking of the heroes.

"When it comes down to who's strongest, I don't know if any of that has been talked out," Portacio admits. "We're all realistic in setting up our characters, so I think we can say, 'My character is stronger than that one,' or 'OK, maybe he's not as powerful, but he can get around that other guy by doing this.' Nobody's going to suddenly produce an A-bomb from his back pocket to 'even the odds.' So, for any crossover, the creators will have to sit down and talk things over first."

Of the armor, Portacio says it has definite limits: It's tough and durable, but can be overcome by specific tactics. "It covers the wearer with a thickness of a quarter-inch," he explains. "It shifts around, thickening to a half-inch, or even a full inch to provide complete protection to the person inside—which leaves other parts of the body more thinly-protected, since it has only so much mass to distribute. If a Wetworks trooper is surrounded and hit by concentrated fire on different parts of his body, he'll start to feel pain and maybe even get broken bones from concussive force. It won't pene-

**The *Wetworks* team includes (from left to right): Jester, Claymore, Grail, Dozer and Pilgrim.**

trate, because the metal won't give, but imagine trying to walk with both legs broken! It's painful, to say the least.

"One of my pet peeves is internal consistency," he adds. "Many comics don't play by the rules they establish, but this book is going to keep a realistic outlook on things. The suits and their wearers have their breaking points; the trick is knowing where they are. One of my biggest criteria in this book is that nothing will just happen. If it looks like it came out of the blue, there's a good reason for it."

Having left plotting and pencilling *X-Men* for Marvel (CS #22), Portacio is excited over the prospect of doing his own work, but admits he's a newcomer to writing.

"There's a lot I have to learn," he says. "The way I do things is to jump right into the middle. Sure, you make mistakes that way, but everybody makes those, and at least you confront them straight on. I would rather try something new and have to struggle to get it right than do the same thing all the time."

One example of that jump-in attitude was his first professional work in comics. "I went to a convention to get into the field as a penciller," he recalls. "Carl Potts said if I needed money, I could get some work inking, so I said I would take it. The project was *Longshot*, and I had *never* done a single page of inking before that.

"As a penciller, my first job was *Punisher*, which was very high-profile," he says. "It was a real test of fire, seeing if I could do good work in the public eye. Personally, if I'm psyched about doing something, if I'm onto something good, I'll jump right in there. I've met so many artists who have creative ability, real talent, and have this yearning to be professional,

Selected Art: Colors, Joe Rosas

but are too scared to even show their work [at a convention] and keep everything to themselves. It's sad—nobody's perfect. You have to push yourself if you want to improve."

Portacio shares writing chores with Brandon Choi, an old friend with whom he developed the *Wetworks* concept. "I signed on with Image and had to do something, so Brandon and I got to talking, because we have many of the same interests. We wanted to do a pseudo-military-type group. They didn't have to be superheroes starting off. We thought it over and found we could have the best of both worlds, taking a special ops team and putting them through events that make them superheroes. Then, they could battle super-villains, monsters, even other superheroes and have a chance of surviving.

"We started with a special ops team who have a 'situation' develop, and they're encased in this top-secret weapon, liquid metal armor-proof against bullets and lasers. Combining technology with their skills and will to survive makes them able to take on super-powered enemies and win."

It is the team's essential humanity that makes them most appealing to Portacio. "Since they're starting as normal humans, unlike the Youngbloods or Spawn, I hope that as they evolve *physically*, they'll remain human *psychologically*. My favorite characters were always men who, no matter what, stayed true to their natures.

"We're going to have to have some characters who begin as very machoistic, who are trying to hide their insecurities. Then, overnight, they become almost indestructible—will they start believing their own press? Some take full advantage of their suits, while others shrink away from the responsibility of being so much more. One Wetworks guy in particular will go into an especially harsh macho phase where he won't back down from *anything*. Another guy goes through a crisis of confidence when he learns that what makes him special *isn't* what he thought—it threatens everything he believes about himself."

Portacio is extremely enthusiastic about Image Comics. "One of the best things about working for Image is that we're responsible for our own work," he says. "If we want to do a gatefold cover for a book, we have to look at its cost. There are many things about the business we have to pay attention to now that were just production problems before. But I love that kind of creative energy."

Despite the artistic freedom they offer, Image is as market-sensitive as other companies, an element Portacio regards with ambivalence.

"Not only the whole field, but a majority of it always has to be market-responsive. That's a 'Catch-22,' because as much as each artist puts into a project, we have to realize that we're

*(continued on page 73)*

**"I can't wait to start building up these characters so that they're all separate individuals, even inside those golden suits," says Portacio.**

All Wetworks Art, Whilce Portacio/Scott Williams/Courtesy Malibu
All Wetworks Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Whilce Portacio & Brandon Choi

# DOUBLE-EDGED JUSTICE

***When Batman meets the Punisher, Denny O'Neil is there to chronicle the action.***

Two of the toughest comics heroes today are about to meet face to face, as the two largest comics publishers join forces for the first time in more than a decade.

The Punisher and Batman will be featured in two different comics, one produced by DC (in June) and the other by Marvel (in August). Although they won't comprise a two-part story, they're complementary tales which enhance each other, according to longtime *Batman* editor Dennis O'Neil, who's scripting the DC production *Batman vs. Punisher: Lake of Fire*.

"Punisher follows Jigsaw because Jigsaw is involved in a criminal transaction," explains O'Neil. "Meanwhile, Batman is looking at the same transaction from a different angle. This is the Azrael version of the Batman, and he tends to see things very much in black and white. He knows the Punisher is, by his standards, a bad guy, but joins with him thinking that a greater good will come of this. Since he can't find Jigsaw without the Punisher, he's going to ally himself with Punisher and, after Jigsaw is captured and the menace to Gotham City is over, then he'll go after the Punisher. That's the story in broad strokes."

Although their meeting isn't a lovefest, the Batman/Punisher pairing still isn't a typical comics story.

"It's not the comic book cliché of two guys bashing each other into hamburger for 10 pages, then saying, 'Wait a minute! You're one of the good guys, so I had better not hit you any more,' " O'Neil notes. "That's the old Stan Lee formula, and that's not a criticism. When Stan started doing it, it wasn't a cliché."

The DC story features Azrael in the Batman costume, and considering the characters involved, O'Neil admits there is bound to be a certain degree of violence.

"It ain't *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*!" he jokes. "But by today's standards, it's not excessive. It's a story that naturally involves a certain amount of violence, but I would like to believe that, at least in my shop, we don't do violence for its own sake anymore. It always has to be in the story's context. When all the dust settles after 'KnightsEnd,' I would like to believe that people will see that it has been *about* violence, and not in a positive way. There have been some fairly serious agendas connected with that big, vast two-year project, one of which is to question whether simple capacity for violence and revenge is what heroism is about in the '90s, and *Batman/Punisher* addresses some of those same thematic concerns."

Azrael/Batman and the Punisher are more similar than they would probably want to admit, admits the writer. "They're actually a lot alike," he confesses. "Both characters tend to see things in pretty stark terms, and they both believe violence is the best way to handle problems involving law and justice. Their motivation, where they're coming from, is completely different."

Not only will the companies' characters cross paths in two different adventures, the stories will remain in

There's a visitor in Gotham City—a visitor whose stock-in-trade is firepower and vengeance. The Punisher is in town, and Batman's not pleased.

complete continuity and become part of each character's mythos.

"We used Azrael because we saw a chance to do a number of things," he says. "For the first time that I'm aware of, one of these crossover stunts is actually in continuity. It fills a nice little spot in the Azrael continuity. At the end of 'Knightfall,' we'll be able to show you exactly where this story fits, what Bruce Wayne was doing while Azrael was off dealing with the Punisher."

One of the direct results of this crossover will be an ongoing *Azrael* series beginning this fall. "That's the main reason that I'm doing the Batman/Punisher book with [artist] Barry Kitson—we hope it'll provide a little bit of a launching pad for the ongoing book. As always, we hope it'll be a terrific story in and of itself," O'Neil says.

Marvel's version of the Punisher/Batman meeting is also in continuity, and the two stories are linked together. "They're both complete in and of themselves," he says. "They each reach a resolution, but the plots are linked. It's a trick first done by Dashiell Hammett. If you look at each one by themselves, you'll have everything that you come to this kind of story for, but if you read both, you'll get the biggest possible picture."

The crossover was first suggested by *Punisher* editor Don Daley, one of O'Neil's former assistant editors. "Don suggested it and called me up," says O'Neil. "I saw no reason not to do it, so I went to [DC publisher] Paul Levitz, and *he* saw no reason not to do it. Don and I went ahead and started planning how it might work, and once the legal stuff was out of the way, a whole bunch of us got together, worked out the details, and got started."

O'Neil says that although it had been a dozen years since the last DC/Marvel crossover, he was more than willing when it was first suggested. "I never had any hesitation about doing this, and this was not the first one that I had wanted to do, but there has always been some other set of problems—whose problems they are or what their nature may have been, I don't know—but something happens on a level above mine that has managed to sabotage them. On the editorial end, we have always been enthusiastic about crossovers."

Jigsaw was selected as the story's villain for a very simple reason. "Jigsaw would be a good Batman villain," O'Neil declares. "My criteria for the artistic end of this stuff is that if these characters did not pre-exist and someone brought them to me, would they fit in our mythos? Both Punisher and Jigsaw would fit very comfortably in the Batman continuity; they would both be good adversaries for either version of Batman in that they're street-level characters, they're more

—and maybe get what I came for.
OKAY, YOU GOT THREE SECONDS TO POINT ME TOWARD A PUNK WHO CALLS HIMSELF JIGSAW.
HEY, I DUNNO NO JIGSAW.
FINE. WHERE DO YOU WANT THE FIRST SLUG?

"Punisher follows Jigsaw to Gotham because Jigsaw is involved in a criminal transaction," explains *Batman* editor and writer Denny O'Neil.

Batman/Punisher: Lake of Fire: Copyright 1994 DC Comics & Marvel Entertainment Group

human-scaled, they deal with crime and matters of simple justice, and Batman is about *all* of that."

Marvel's version will feature a Chuck Dixon script and art by John Romita Jr. and star the Bruce Wayne Batman. O'Neil's very comfortable with that collaboration because Dixon has written for both him and Daley. "Chuck is the one guy in the creative mix who works on both characters, so there was never any doubt that he would do at least *one* of these books."

O'Neil also has high praise for the art of Barry Kitson, who is illustrating the DC version.

"So far it has been terrific," he observes. "I'm doing this project Marvel-style, giving Barry a plot to work from rather than a completed script, and I haven't worked this way on a serious project in 12 or 15 years. My own schedule is a nightmare at the moment, and there's no way I could get a full script written. I gave Barry a reasonably detailed plot, and he has been feeding me artwork to write from."

*Batman* seldom emphasizes firearms, while The Punisher has his own extensive armory, but O'Neil says the pair still mesh fairly easily. "I'm simply trying to be true to the Punisher's character here," he says. "I'm writing him as a tough guy, and I'm having a lot of fun doing it, because I haven't really written that kind of individual in years. It's fun to do that Hammett-esque or Raymond Chandler-esque first person narrative. He is who he is—I'm not even sure I would want to hang around with Batman if he existed in real life, let alone the Punisher. That has very little to do with my work as a writer. Obsessed characters are always the most interesting and fun to write about, but in real life, they're *not* much fun to hang around!"

DC's Batman/Spawn crossover, *War Devil* (CS #42) was arranged differently, and the two groups involved didn't collaborate at all. "Those stories are completely separate," O'Neil explains. "We each had a gun to the other's head—there was mutual veto power, but no collaboration.

"There's really not much comparison. This one is a genuine partnership in that I've had a lot of interchange with Don Daley, and I went to Chuck Dixon to find out how to write the Punisher. We've collaborated every step of the way. *Spawn/Batman* was my agreeing with Todd McFarlane over the phone to do the project, then the business and legal people took over. I had one 20-minute conversation with Frank Miller; we looked at each other's material but didn't have much interaction."

Considering that Batman has also met up with the Hulk, Judge Dredd and Grendel, O'Neil agrees that Batman seems to have a natural propensity toward inter-company crossovers. "He's one of the great icons in comics. Every artist in the world would like to draw him at least once, and in our interpretation of the Batman, he has many different costumes," the writer explains. "We've established several times in the past five years that there are probably 200 suits down there in the Batcave, so each artist can give the figure his own interpretation and still not violate continuity. Superman has one super-suit, so [*Superman* editor] Mike Carlin has to make sure that it's more or less the same each time it's drawn. I don't care how long the damned Batman ears are! If they're three inches longer today than yesterday, we can say he just changed clothes overnight!

"The power defines the character, and in Batman's case, he has been very lucky over the past 55 years in that he has managed to get some of the very best people in the medium. Each of those decades has seemed to have a couple of really good Batman writers

"I saw would be a good Batman villain," says O'Neil, the writer behind *Batman vs. Punisher: Lake of Fire*, of his simple reason for the villainous casting.

"They both believe violence [illegible] justice," O'Neil notes of the similarities between the Punisher and Azrael/Batman.

"I'm writing [the Punisher] as a tough guy, and I'm having a lot of fun doing it," reveals O'Neil. "I haven't written that kind of individual in years."

Design & Layout: Vera Naughton

and artists, and he's developed into a real character. Writers like his humanity. He's about human imperfection and perfectibility, and that's interesting material for a writer. You can get him into genuine trouble, and you can get some genuine emotion into it; there's also some genuine personality underneath the heroic trappings."

As editor of the ongoing Batman series, O'Neil promises the climax of the "KnightsEnd" series will contain a major surprise.

"There is every possible speculation about where we'll go from here, and I'm sure that a number of people have guessed our plans down to the final crossed 'T.' I wasn't sure before last week *exactly* what we were going to do; I wrote the last chapter in such a way that the story could logically go in about three different directions, and I *didn't know* which direction it would go in," he explains.

"We have a couple of surprises left. I worry that in some ways, we're going to be thwarting readers' expectations, because it's *not* going to be ending in a logical comic book way. We're being very true to our material, and the logical comic book ending would have been false to what this whole thing has been about. But anytime you thwart the readers' expectations, you're taking a chance. If you win, you win big, if you lose, you're reading about what a jerk you are in the fan press for the next three years. None of that has any effect on sales, but I've *never* not been in the business of trying to please my readers! This thing has had some very serious aspects from the beginning, and to end it in an easy, logical, spectacularly visual way wouldn't have been true to what the story is about. I also think this story will change some of the direction of the series—not 90 degrees, maybe 40 degrees."

Most of the alterations in the Batman titles will be the result of Bruce Wayne's recent experiences. "We're changing the characterization of Bruce a little bit. Comics have gotten fairly sophisticated in the past 10 years. I don't completely understand them as an art form anymore, because so many things have happened, they've evolved in strange directions. But I think we wouldn't be true to the character of Bruce Wayne if he were not affected by this stuff. He does things in 'KnightsEnd' that he has never done before, and we make him aware of that. And as he changes, so does the direction of the entire series."

Rumors have been rampant about the original Robin's return to the *Batman* storyline, and O'Neil admits that he will be coming back.

"Dick Grayson will be heavily involved in 'KnightsEnd' right down to the final chapter," he says. "But, the final chapter is basically a two-person story; it's Jean-Paul Valley [Azrael] and Bruce Wayne. Nobody else is involved, it's a duel between the two."

Ideas for the *Azrael* series this fall are currently being worked out, and O'Neil is excited at the prospect. "It could go in four or five different directions without being untrue to what has been established about Azrael," he says. "Barry Kitson and I are both of a mind to try and go for the gold—not do a punch-up superhero book, but try and do something a couple of degrees of sophistication above that. I don't think we'll be as esoteric as *The Question*, for example, but on the other hand, it won't be the standard costumed superhero book, either.

"The first year we'll explore questions of identity. I mean, this poor kid can't possibly know who he is at this point—until he was 22, Jean-Paul had

*(continued on page 72)*

"Obsessed characters are always the most interesting and fun to write about," O'Neil enthuses. "And you won't find two more obsessed guys anywhere."

YOU'RE THE PUNISHER. I RECOGNIZE YOU FROM WANTED POSTERS.
I HEARD I COULD FIND TOM BRESSI IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD
I FIND YOU INSTEAD
YOU FIGURE TO BE THE BATMAN-

BLOOD&CHOKLIT
RIVERDALE HIGH SOCK-HOP
I KNEW THERE'D BE A CHAPERONE BUT THIS IS RIDICULOUS!
THE TEAM-UP YOU THOUGHT WOULD NEVER HAPPEN – AND ARCHIE AND THE PUNISHER WISHES YOU WERE RIGHT!

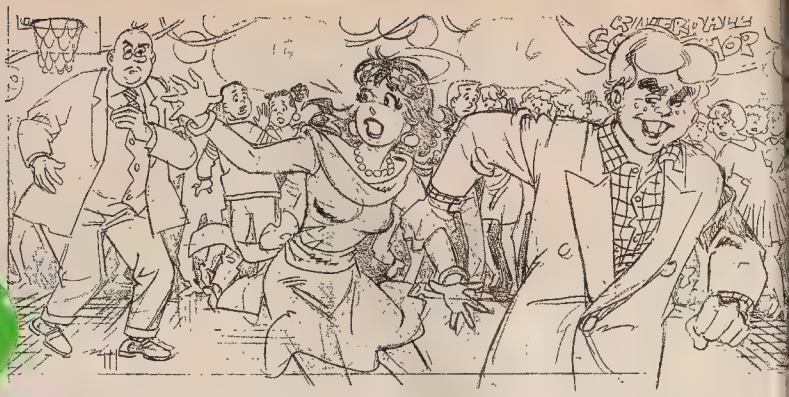
Art: Stan Goldberg/Henry Scarpelli Design & Layout: Vera Naughton

Bullets are whizzing around Pop's Choklit Shop. There's trouble in Riverdale, trouble with a capital "T" and that rhymes with "P" and that stands for Punisher.

Throughout comic book history, editors have often used the phrase "the strangest team-up of all time" to describe some rather pedestrian pairings, but a project may have finally come along that actually lives up to the hype.

Comic book worlds have collided in the past, but it's hard to imagine worlds as different as those that meet in *The Punisher Meets Archie*.

When the one-shot crossover comic between Marvel and Archie was an-



A hitman is paying a visit to Riverdale wearing the face of its favorite son—Archie—and trouble's hot on his heels.

nounced early this year (after many months under high security, when the event was referred to as "Project A"), fans were skeptical. However, *The Punisher Meets Archie* is real.

"It's really going to happen," says writer Batton Lash. "It's not a dream, not a hoax, not an imaginary tale. It's not even portals of parallel Earths opening up! The Punisher has come to Riverdale in pursuit of a criminal who just happens to look like Archie, and that's where the comedy ensues."

Both the violent vigilante and America's favorite teenager remain true to their own characters in this story. "I tried to play it straight, and write it as 'What if the Punisher went to Riverdale?' " Lash explains. "You've got this grim guy in a very silly atmosphere. What's going to happen? I tried to play it very straight, and it's my desire that someday, if someone puts together an index of all the stories in the Punisher's career, this can easily fit. I wrote it as a legitimate Punisher story, and as a legitimate Archie story."

Lash says the crossover concept was first suggested before he was involved, and he actually joined the project unintentionally.

"[Marvel editor] Tom DeFalco and Victor Gorelick, the editor of *Archie*, are old friends who go way back," Lash says. "A year or so ago, they were having dinner, and Victor was bemoaning the fact that Archie never had a really strong foothold in the direct sales market. One of them suggested a crossover to let Marvel readers become aware of Archie, but they couldn't figure out *who* he should meet. One of them said, 'Let him meet the Punisher,' and they had a big laugh.

"A few months later, Victor was in San Diego. He used to letter my comic strip, *Wolff and Byrd, Counselors of the Macabre*, back in 1980. He was my main letterer for five years, so I knew Victor pretty well. I met him for dinner. We were talking, and I think I suggested that Archie should cross over with Jimmy Olsen, drawn by Fred Hembeck. Victor said, 'Funny you should mention bizarre, wacky crossovers...' He told me about his dinner with DeFalco. I just stared at him and said, 'Victor, that's great! That is so bizarre!' He said, 'Yeah, but we wouldn't know how to do it.'

"Believe me, I wasn't pitching for this job. But, I said, 'All you do is A, B and C, and that will lead to Z.' He told me to write it down and he would show it to DeFalco. Victor had been after me for years to write something for Archie and I kept putting him off, so I figured, 'OK, this is crazy enough that it may be fun, and it's certainly a challenge.' At the time, I had no affection for the Punisher, and Archie was always just there. I did the proposal and showed it to Victor, figuring that would be the end of it. At the San Diego Comics Convention, Tom DeFalco came up to me, flicked his cigar and said, 'That plot got a really good response. I think we're going to do it.' Then, I met Don Daley, editor of the Punisher line, and he was very complimentary and excited about the whole thing. I thought, 'What have I gotten myself into? This might really happen!' I always worked on my own stuff; I never thought I would be working for Marvel or Archie. But by the convention's end, Victor said they approved the plot—the only provision was that I couldn't tell a soul about it!"

A heavy blanket of security covered the entire project from that point on. "There was the legendary 'Only seven people knew about this,' and I guess it's true! Once the word broke, people were calling me saying, 'This is a joke, right?' because my name was attached to it and the concept was very bizarre. They thought it was an elaborate gag."

The writer never had any desire to write either character, and in some ways, the Punisher actually drove him away from reading

Punisher: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group

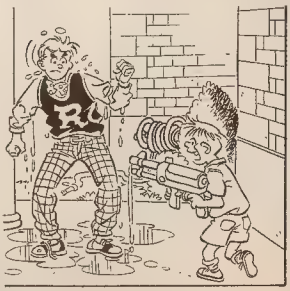
According to writer Batton Lash, the Punisher will do anything to protect an innocent, "and you can't get more innocent than the Riverdale gang."

Marvel Comics. "I never had any affection for the Punisher; I wasn't even that familiar with him," he says. "Twenty years ago, I had quit buying Marvel Comics, which was right about the time of the Punisher's introduction in *Amazing Spider-Man* #129. I remember Marvel in their heyday, and they weren't cutting it in 1973. Along came this character, the Punisher, who was just so alien to what I knew and loved about Marvel. That's what I found very ironic about this whole thing. The first and *only* thing I've ever done for Marvel is this major project involving the Punisher! The Punisher became a buzz word in the comics industry for something that sells too much and has too much violence; it's your typical, insipid Marvel comic.

"When I was doing my research, I felt that the Punisher was getting a bad rap, because for all popular characters, there are good *and* bad stories. There were a couple of very good Punisher stories, quite a few clunkers and some great potential in the character. It depends on who's handling it—if you've got a good feel for a guy like this, like Frank Miller and Chuck Dixon do, it works. But if you're ham-handed, you just perpetuate the stereotype of the Punisher as this horribly excessive character."

Lash's version of the grim 'n' gritty vigilante isn't quite as dark as some readers may have come to expect. "The Punisher is a guy who will *not* let himself enjoy himself," the writer observes. "He's on this perpetual revenge kick, constantly getting revenge on the people who've killed his family and robbed him of his life. That can be pretty grim, but eventually, you have to get on with your life! This is the point I try to bring out in *The Punisher Meets Archie*. He goes to this town, which is a little more light-hearted than he's used to, and he enjoys it."

Providing the perfect counterpoint to the Marvel hero is Riverdale's favorite son. "Archie is just a kid in his own little world," Lash says. "Archie, Veronica and the whole gang are like many kids I've known. They're aware of the outside world, but the most important thing is who's dating whom and will they get to go out this weekend. They live in a very small, sheltered world, and that's how I tried to play it. The naiveté is so powerful—and I see this in many Archie stories—that they don't really comprehend how serious things can get."



**It would seem that the Punisher's volatile presence in Riverdale has worn off on innocent, happy-go-lucky Archie.**

The writer has utilized one facet of the Punisher's character by placing him in an entire town of innocent people. "Reading the Punisher stories, I've noticed that his whole thing is that he'll do anything to protect an innocent, and you can't get more innocent than the Riverdale gang," says Lash. "So, the Punisher crossing over into Archie isn't as far-fetched as people might think."

A compromise had to be reached on the question of violence, and this story contains less violence than most Punisher stories, but more than the typical Archie tales.

"I haven't seen the pencils yet, but there are several shootouts," Lash explains. "I would never do anything violent or gratuitous. Even if I were writing *The Punisher* regularly, there wouldn't be much violence, so that problem was taken care of. There's a lot of off-screen shooting and a major gun battle in the Riverdale High Dance Hall while the dance is going on. There are a lot of bullets flying, and Archie and Jughead *are* in danger."

The art is a combination of Marvel-style work by John Buscema and Archie-style pencils by Stan Goldberg. "Stan draws the Archie portion and John draws the Marvel portion; when the two elements meet, it's going to be like a jam drawing, with the Punisher by Buscema and Archie by Goldberg. The Punisher comes from a totally different environment than Riverdale; it'll be so goofy, it's funny."

Lash also contributed artistically to the book, which will be released with two different covers. "I wrote the story, but I also laid it out, so I did my Harvey Kurtzman-esque layouts for the entire story," he says. "It was up to Goldberg and Buscema to carry them out, though I would never tell Buscema or Goldberg to follow it that way. I would love it if they did, though, and I can't wait to see the pencilled pages! But, I did the original Archie cover layouts for that version with Archie at the dance, and bless Goldberg's heart, he followed it almost exactly!"

Cooperation has made the project a dream collaboration for Lash. "Don Daley has been terrific to work with," he says. "I know how busy he is, and it wasn't until I was near the end of this project that I found out the Punisher was going to meet Batman. As an aside, I was able to toss in a reference to that in *The Punisher Meets Archie* for continuity's sake. Everything had to be approved by tons of people."

**Lash is the mind behind *Wolff & Byrd, Counselors of the Macabre*—the continuing comic strip of two attorneys who represent supernatural clients.**

Lash is also the creator of *Wolff and Byrd, Counselors of the Macabre*. The weekly comic strip features attorneys who represent supernatural clients, and appears in *National Law Journal*, *Comics Buyer's Guide* and the nine *Brooklyn Paper* publications. *Wolff and Byrd* has been

*(continued on page 72)*

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Archie Meets Punisher: Copyright 1994 Marvel Entertainment & Archie Publications Inc.
Wolff & Byrd Card Trademark & Copyright 1993 Rafton Lash/Courtesy Tmps

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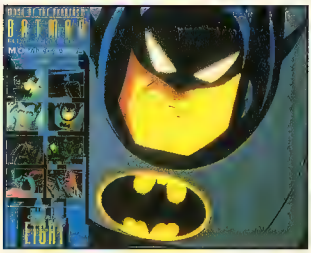


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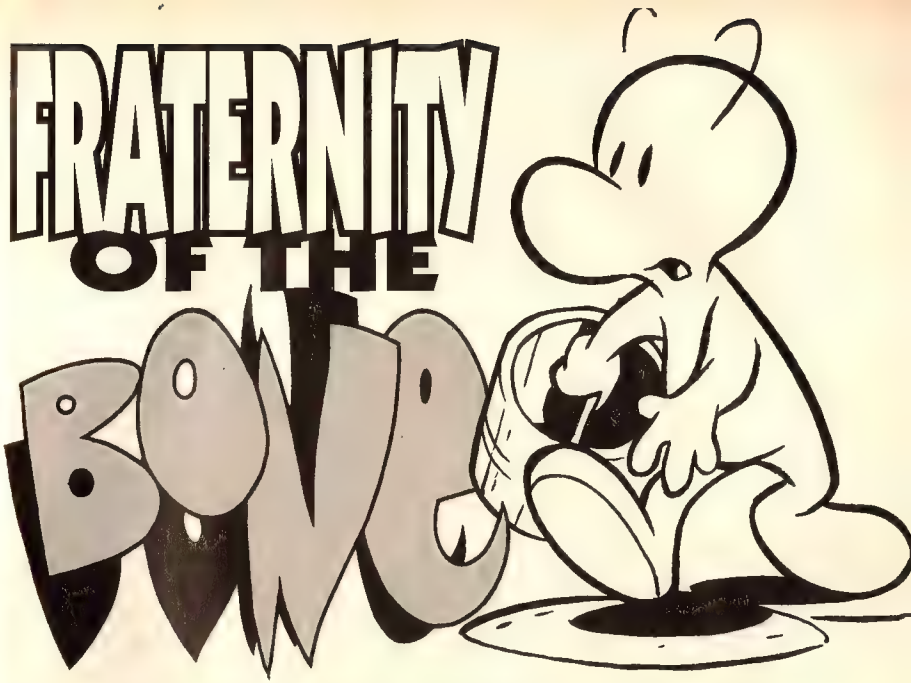
# FRATERNITY OF THE BONE



## *Jeff Smith finds real danger chronicling the adventures of three boys from Boneville.*

By HARLEY JEBENS

The book is about growing up, in many ways," says Jeff Smith, creator and publisher of the black-and-white title *Bone*. "In the beginning, the three Bone cousins are ejected from Boneville, the safe, comfortable world in which they had always lived. And they end up in this outside world that's very different from what they expected it to be. That's a lot like what happens when people move away from their parents for the first time."

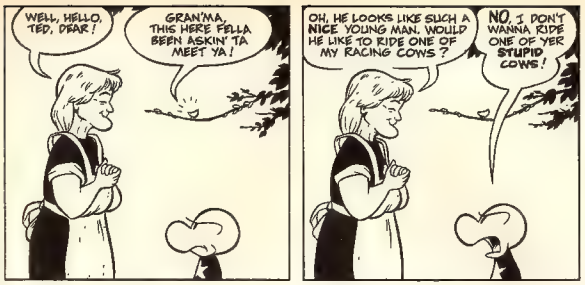
Of course, Smith also describes his book as "Bugs Bunny meets *Lord of the Rings*," so if you expect some solemn treatise on breaking away from the nest and its resulting trauma, look elsewhere.

"I've got a story to tell," Smith says, "and within that story, I get to talk about the things I think about. Things like good and bad, honesty, truth and love. And things like, 'What is there besides what we see? Is there more out there than what our senses tell us?' Within the story's confines, I get to explore all of these things. And, of course, I like to keep those aspects light and have a good time."

What is the secret of *Bone*'s appeal? Maybe it's the central characters: the three Bone cousins, Fone Bone, Phoney Bone and Smiley Bone; Fone Bone's beautiful friend Thorn; Thorn's eccentric Gran'ma; the enigmatic and wise Dragon; the horrifyingly hilarious rat creatures; and the mysterious and vengeful Hooded One. Maybe it's Smith's drawing style, which harks back to the newspaper comic strips and Carl Barks' *Uncle Scrooge* stories that the artist cites as among his influences. Maybe it's the contrast that this light-hearted adventure strip enjoys when compared with the darker tone that comics seem steeped in nowadays.

**Following a college newspaper strip and an animation stint, Smith (that's him in the center) has taken his creations into the self-publishing world.**

Smith has his own theories. "What I'm trying to do is be true to what I enjoyed reading, especially when I was a kid. When I was younger, I really, really enjoyed *Asterix*, *Uncle Scrooge* and *Pogo*, as well as *Superman* and *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*. And I always wanted Uncle Scrooge and Asterix to go on a *serious* adventure. I mean, Carl Barks' Uncle Scrooge stories are the best, bar none, but they never crossed the line. You always


WELL, HELLO, TED, DEAR!
GRAN'MA, THIS HERE FELLA BEEN ASKIN' TA MEET YA!
OH, HE LOOKS LIKE SUCH A NICE YOUNG MAN. WOULD HE LIKE TO RIDE ONE OF MY RACING COWS?
NO, I DON'T WANNA RIDE ONE OF YER STUPID COWS!
TED, DEAR, I THINK YOU'D BETTER LEAVE. I'M GONNA TEAR THIS LITTLE FELLA APART FROM TH' INSIDE OUT.
YES, M'AM. (SEE YA AROUND, PAL.)

All Art & Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1991, 1992, 1993 Jeff Smith

**"Gran'ma Ben may be my favorite character," notes Smith. "She has this super-human strength, which is probably based on Popeye."**

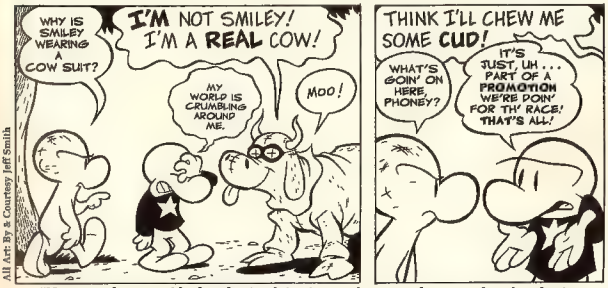
knew Uncle Scrooge was going to come through OK, and he was always going to get his fortune back, but Uncle Scrooge and his nephews were never *really* in danger. It was exciting *how* they were going to get out of it.

"So, I thought, 'Wouldn't it be fun to do those kinds of stories, but throw *real* danger into it. And actually have the possibility of a consequence happening.' You know, having their lives be changed.

"And I also thought, 'Wouldn't it be fun to take all the Uncle Scrooge stories, for example, and read them from the beginning to the end, all in a row. And even though each story was [self-contained] in the comic, what if it also told a chronological story from beginning to end?

"So that's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to take all the elements I loved as a kid—adventure, serious storytelling and cartoon characters—and put them all together into a larger story. I'm also a *Lord of the Rings* freak, so the idea of a quest and darker characters appeals to me.

"Bone is the title character," Smith says. "That's how everyone except the other Bones refer to Fone Bone. They just call him 'Bone.' It also refers to the people of Boneville. They're Bones. The title has no other extra meaning."


WHY IS SMILEY WEARING A COW SUIT?
I'M NOT SMILEY! I'M A REAL COW!
MY WORLD IS CRUMBLING AROUND ME.
MOO!
THINK I'LL CHEW ME SOME CUD!
WHAT'S GOIN' ON HERE, PHONEY?
IT'S JUST, UH . . . PART OF A PROMOTION WE'RE DOIN' FOR TH' RACE! THAT'S ALL!

All Art: By & Courtesy Jeff Smith

**"No matter how stupid what they're doing is, my characters have to take what they're doing seriously," the creator declares.**

Thus far in the series, the only Bones who have been introduced are the three cousins—small, white creatures with varying personalities.

"All the Bones, and really all of my characters," Smith explains, "are aspects of me in some way. Fone Bone is like me the way I think I am when presenting myself to other people. He's open, friendly, sincere.

"Phoney Bone is the yang to Fone's yin. He's the Ego, greedy and whiny. He's me the way I probably really am.

"Smiley is the kind of guy who doesn't make the best decisions in the world, but doesn't really care about that. He's the part of me that says, 'Why, *sure*, I'll publish my own comic book.'

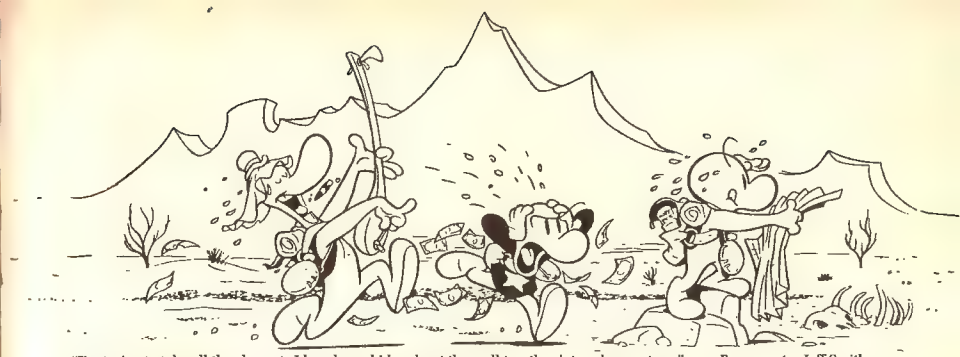
"Thorn is a composite of many of the women I've known, the ideal parts of them at any rate. She's based a great deal on my wife. She's a very good person, and a strong character.

"Gran'ma Ben may be my favorite character. She's a bit rude. She knows a lot about what's going on. She has this super-human strength that she can draw on in times on need, which is probably based on Popeye."

The series begins after the three Bone cousins have been driven out of Boneville, thanks to one of Phoney's many schemes gone awry. The Bone cousins have wandered through a desert, and ended up in a valley, which is where they met the Dragon, Thorn and Gran'ma Ben. This valley is where the action of *Bone* (the series) takes place.

Smith says he has no plans to introduce any other denizens of Boneville into the series, but that "the outline I have for this story is open enough that something like that *could* happen. I know how this story ends and I know what it's about. The big story that involves an ongoing conflict between the rat creatures and (their leader) the Hooded One, the Dragon and Gran'ma Ben—I know what they're battling over and I know how it will end. I know what's going to happen in the final chapters. In fact, the last three books are written already. I have them in a notebook.

"But what happens between where I'm at now, and when I get to those three books—I have about five stops planned on my map. What I do around those five stops—I heard Neil Gaiman describe writing as, 'I'm planning a trip from San Francisco to New York. I know I'm going to stop in Chicago, but I don't know what I'm going to do the rest of the trip in between.' That was probably the most perfect description of writing that I've ever heard. The plot is completely wide open; if new ideas come into play, I can use them, as long as I know I've still got to get to Chicago. So then, once I get to Chicago, I can spread out and meander around.

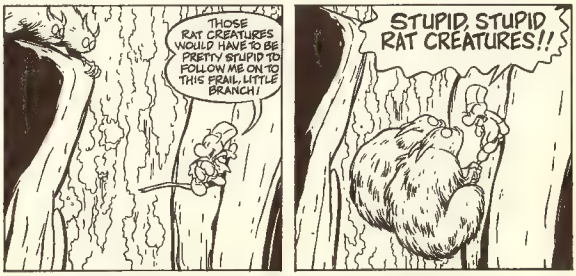


**"I'm trying to take all the elements I loved as a kid and put them all together into a larger story," says *Bone* creator Jeff Smith.**

As long as my final destination is New York, then I'm OK." The overall story he's writing and drawing could take from five to 10 years to finish.

Of that story, Smith says, "There's definitely a connection between Phoney Bone and the hooded figure. How big that connection is right now is unclear—and that connection could get bigger. The first layer of the connection will be revealed soon. I mean, we already know part of it—the Hooded One wants Phoney Bone's soul. But we don't know *why*. Phoney himself doesn't know how he got into that position."

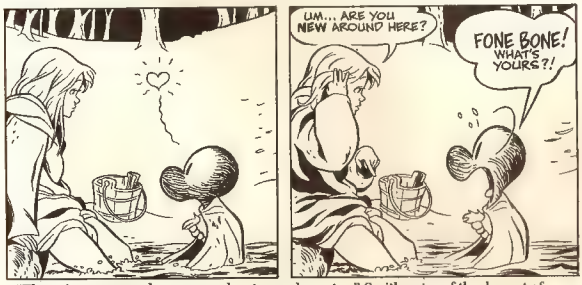
Smith does reveal that "the conflict between Phoney Bone and the Hooded One will lead all the Bone cousins into the major confrontation that concludes this story."


THOSE RAT CREATURES WOULD HAVE TO BE PRETTY STUPID TO FOLLOW ME ON TO THIS FRAIL, LITTLE BRANCH!
STUPID, STUPID RAT CREATURES!!

**The rat creatures are a major part of the storyline and a problem for the Bones.**

The origins of *Bone* lie at Ohio State University, where Smith came up with a comic strip for the college's newspaper, the *Ohio State University Lantern*, with a daily readership of 50,000 people. That strip was called *Thorn*, "just because it was supposed to be about Fone Bone's fixation on this ideal woman," Smith says. He describes *Thorn* as "a *Doonesbury*-type strip, but set in the *Lord of the Rings*, if you can picture that. Not very different than what it is now in the comic, except that the jokes were faster coming. Each day had to be its own set-up."

At Ohio State, Smith, who had always been interested in animation, met animation buffs Jim Kammerud and Martin Fuller. "We started up a company in about 1986," he says. "At the same time, I was talking to a couple of syndicates—King Features and Tribune Media Services—who were interested in *Thorn* or *Bone* as a daily strip. But things didn't really work out. They didn't think they could sell a continuing adventure strip. Although they did like the Bone characters, they didn't like Thorn or the adventure part. Both syndicates thought I should just have it be the Bones in Boneville, and it would be a gag-a-day, Smurf-like thing. And they also wanted to own the property outright. I worked with them a while, but I realized that I didn't want to change my strip to a gag-a-day. I couldn't do it. I just wasn't that kind of a writer. And I didn't want to sell the property. So, I got side-tracked into animation.

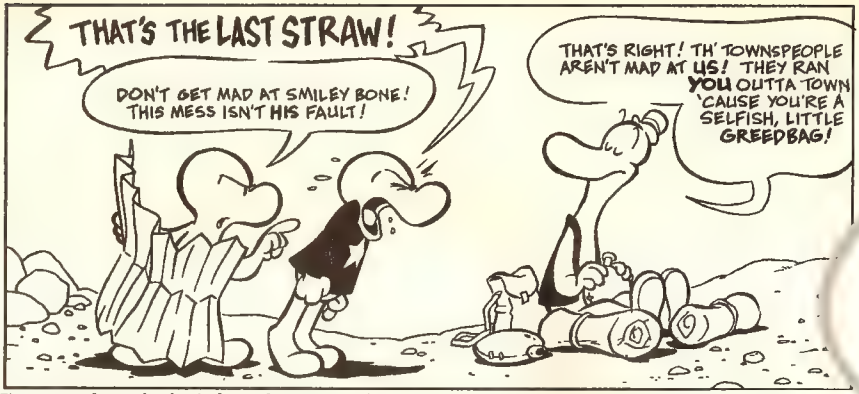



**"Thorn is a very good person, and a strong character," Smith notes of the dearest of Fone Bone's heart.**

"Once we got started on our animation studio, we really got into it. We were all self-taught. None of us had ever been to a big Hollywood animation studio. But we found some good animators, and we got going." The company did TV commercials, and some work on the feature-length cartoons *Bebe's Kids*, *FernGully* and *Rover Dangerfield*.

But Smith always wanted to get back to those characters from the college newspaper strip.

"In college, I wrote the story as I went. By the time I had done it for about four years, I could look back and see that there really was a good story there, except that I didn't put it there when I was in college. I just kind of


THAT'S THE LAST STRAW!
DON'T GET MAD AT SMILEY BONE! THIS MESS ISN'T HIS FAULT!
THAT'S RIGHT! TH' TOWNSPEOPLE AREN'T MAD AT US! THEY RAN YOU OUTTA TOWN 'CAUSE YOU'RE A SELFISH, LITTLE GREEDBAG!

Design & Layout: Len H. Leake

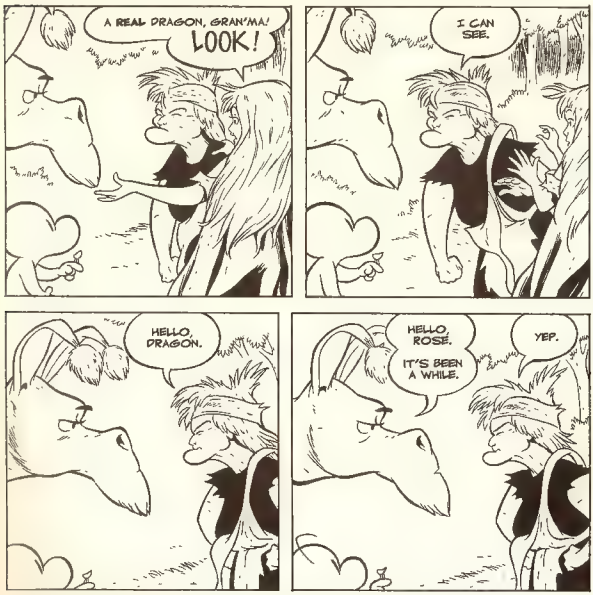
**First run out of town, then lost in the woods, Fone Bone, Phoney Bone and Smiley Bone end up in Barrelhaven, where they meet the darndest people.**

wrote along. The overall story clicked in my head, and I always wanted to do it again some time, with the benefit of going back through the college material and saying, 'Oh, this joke fell flat,' or 'This was sophomoric,' or 'This joke really worked.' And I could take everything that worked, use it and get rid of everything that didn't."

According to Smith, an encounter with the first issue of *The Tick* (CS #7), in 1988 or 1989, prompted him to begin exploring the comic book market. "I picked it up and read it, and it was a riot. It was this black-and-white book with a color cover, and I had never seen anything like that before in my life. The person who gave it to me had bought it in a comic book store. And I had no idea there were comic book stores. I stopped reading comics in 1972, and there were no comic book stores then.

"So, finding the stores was quite a surprise. I was amazed that the whole system even existed for direct sales. Even more amazing was my discovery of the independent titles. When I saw things like *The Tick* and *Cerebus*, it blew my mind that people were doing smaller books that were actually getting on the shelves. And they were good. Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* had just come out. I read that and I was just astonished at his storytelling, the way he moved the story from panel to panel without using 'meanwhile.' He didn't use little exposition panels, he just moved it along, like it was a movie. When the scene switched, he figured you were smart enough to figure that out.

"These things together suddenly made it seem to me that a comic book was a medium, a place to do a good, creative story...it seemed very possible for me to do the kind of thing I wanted to do."




**The relationship between the Dragon and Grand'ma Ben is a mystery. All Smith will say is, "I know what's going to happen."**

His experience with the newspaper syndicates had taught Smith that he didn't want to sell his work to anyone, or work through any established comic companies. If he wanted to create *Bone* the comic book, he would also have to publish it himself.

"After I looked at the market," Smith says, "I went to the library and I started doing research, a lot of real, dry, business-type boring stuff that, if anyone interested in self-publishing isn't willing to do, then forget it right now because it's just like being in school: You have to do homework;

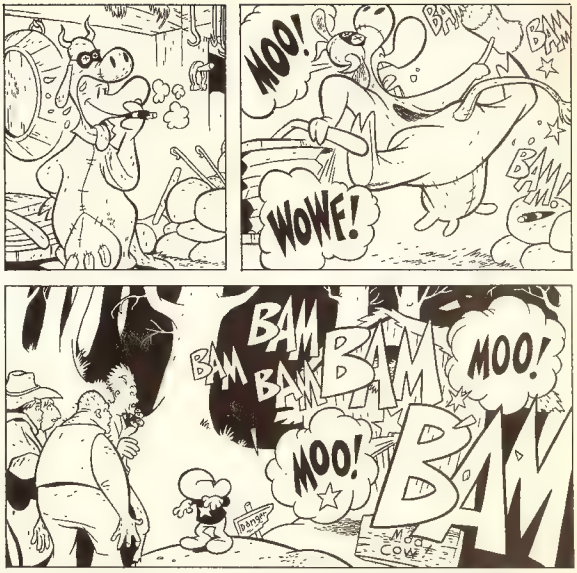
you've got to write business plans for the bank; you've got to do it for real. In the library, you can get so much information. There are books on who buys comics, who publishes them, what kind of materials other artists use, what kind of pens, what kinds of inks. There are books that explain the printing process. A wealth of information, including market figures. What kind of money is in the comic book industry? It's something like a $6 or $7 million-a-year industry right now."

All that research was invaluable, Smith says, but he does admit, "Boy, did I enter the market at the *wrong* time. I was reading microfilmed articles about what a boom was going on in the [black-and-white comic book] industry. Of course, this was in 1990 when I was doing my research. So, all my articles were from early 1989. I was reading about how there were so many black-and-white comics that *anybody* could make a living doing this. Of course, when I entered the market, my information was already a year old. And it was a bad market to enter [thanks to the infamous black-and-white glut spawned by the enormous success of Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*].

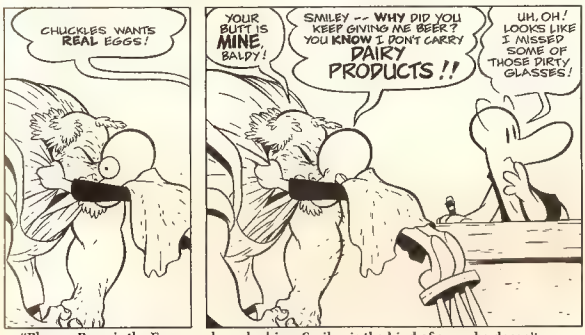
"Still, I didn't meet any resistance from the distributors. They're all extremely professional, and if you send them a professional solicitation, a professional letter with a copy of the comic and you don't sound like an idiot, they'll list your comic. After that, it's up to you," Smith says.

"Now, I didn't get much support. They didn't really push the books or anything. They put it in there, and left it up to me and the book to do the rest. It was a very difficult struggle for the first year. Retailers resisted it just because it's a black-and-white comic, and so many black-and-white books went into comic book stores in the late '80s and just sat there."

For a while, it looked as if *Bone* was going to just sit there, too. Sales of *Bone* were slow at first, Smith says, and bottomed out—*way* out—with issue #4. Still, the enthusiasm of his readers, and the praise he was beginning to draw from other comic professionals, kept him going. Larry Marder, who writes and draws *Tales from the Beanworld* (CS #31), put Smith in touch with Dave Sim, who writes and draws *Cerebus* (CS #1). Sim liked Smith's work so much, he previewed *Bone* in the pages of *Cerebus*. Don and Maggie Thompson of the *Comic Buyer's Guide* gave *Bone* a positive review. Support for Smith's efforts began to pick up, to the point where he now receives 30 to 50 letters a week.




**Phoney Bone's get-rich-quick-by-fixing-the-Great-Cow-Race scam ends up keeping him, and the others, in Barrelhaven.**


CHUCKLES WANTS REAL EGGS!
YOUR BUTT IS MINE, BALDY!
SMILEY -- WHY DID YOU KEEP GIVING ME BEER? YOU KNOW I DON'T CARRY DAIRY PRODUCTS!!
UH, OH! LOOKS LIKE I MISSED SOME OF THOSE DIRTY GLASSES!

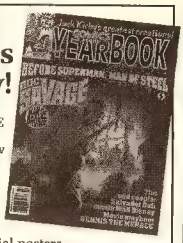
**"Phoney Bone is the Ego, greedy and whiny; Smiley is the kind of guy who doesn't make the best decisions, but doesn't really care," Smith explains.**

One of the qualities that's striking about *Bone* is the way it mixes the serious and the fanciful in an unpretentious manner. Nowhere is that mixture more evident than in the Great Cow Race that the action in the latest issues of *Bone* has been leading up to.

"I didn't really plan on the Cow Race," Smith admits. "Gran'ma Ben is based on a woman I knew—the grandmother of a girl I was dating in high school. She was gruff, and kind of rude, just like Gran'ma Ben is; and she would actually race cows. She wore Nikes around the house, and she would sort of dotter around. Then, she would look out the window and see that the cows had gotten loose from their fence or something, and she would say, 'There go those cows again. Better round 'em up.' And she would be off, running down the road after the cows. That was the genesis of Gran'ma Ben. Originally, I just dropped this line into the story as sort of a *Far Side*-type gag—'Oh, here's this old woman and she races cows.' And it just sort of grew from that.

*(continued on page 64)*

## Relive Comics History!

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# Worthless

*(continued from page 36)*

A year later, Martin Goodman, having sold Marvel Comics at a tidy profit, plowed some of that back into a new company, Atlas/Seaboard Comics, which was run by his son, Chip. It was a major newsstand comics line, the first in the post-Silver Age era.

I know of people who to this day have stacks of bagged copies of such immortal titles as *Ironjaw, Phoenix, The Scorpion, The Destructor,* etc., stashed in their cellars, neatly bagged and never to be read. Why? The ordinary reader never got excited by Atlas—it failed. Today, they guide out at about a buck per copy, mint. And despite the fact that some titles featured art by Neal Adams, Mike Ploog, Steve Ditko and Howard Chaykin, you can't move them with a forklift.

This is another important collecting truism: If a comics line dies out, eventually interest and price will wither. This is why to this day, the most sought-after comics are either DCs or Marvels. Most of the rest are worth only small change. If Marvel had gone out of business in the '60s, they would be curiosities today with modest values, like *Brother Power, the Geek.* If Image, Valiant, Malibu, Topps, Defiant or any of the newer houses (take your pick) fail, the value of their books is doomed to shrivel. And even if they succeed, their books are unlikely to grow much in *true* value, even if the price does appreciate over time. Why? First, there's the inexorable inflation that will erode the book value year after year.

But more importantly, current hot comics share the same Achilles' heel that post-1970 copies have. *Everybody's* saving them; nobody's throwing them out. Thus, the recollector market that would normally kick in around the year 2025 simply *won't* happen. And whatever 2025 collectors may be looking for 1993 comics won't have to search far for a pristine mint copy. There will be thousands of them available—unread. If the collector of 2025 doesn't like your pricing, he won't have to haggle, fearful he won't find a copy as good as yours elsewhere—he'll just go on to the next table. Imagine the price wars to compete for the pool of collectors in 2025! More than likely, you'll see that stuff in the $10 bins (inflation, remember?), and the investor/speculator will be eating paper once again.

The sad fact is that every time the collector and investor/speculator jump on a new title, line or character in large numbers, they get burned. Sure, prices may go up in the short run, but the supply quickly outpaces the demand. Examples? *Conan* #1. *Howard the Duck. G.I. Joe. Watchmen. The Dark Knight Returns. Secret Wars.* All once hot, now lukewarm.

So if virtually every 1993 fan is buying *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* #1, how can it appreciate in value? The early Marvels are only as valuable as they are today for their scarcity in mint condition, as well as their historical importance and desirability. They were underdistributed and often ignored in favor of DC's titles.

I guarantee you that if there had been investor/speculators around when *FF* #1 came out, it would not be worth the money it is today. Sure, *FF* might be just as popular and desirable a book, but there would be *tons* more of them out there, most in very fine to mint grade. An awful lot of *FF* #1s were thrown out after reading. Those that were saved got pretty ragged. Even so, I've seen as many as six nice copies on one dealer's table at a given time. If you want an *FF* #1 and are willing to pay *Guide,* it's an easy book to score.

There's a saying in the stock market that when the little guy jumps in, then the market has peaked. Why? The little guy will only invest in a sure thing; sure things *never* pay off. It's the same with comics; if a comic is being touted as "hot" before it's even printed, it's not. Guaranteed.

In 1993, comics sales are higher than they have been in decades, but readership is down. Drastically. That is, actual readership (i.e. people who buy comics simply to *read* them). With the millions of issues of certain Image titles, *X-Men* #1 and Todd McFarlane's *Spider-Man* #1 being sold above actual readership, it would take a major upturn in demand for those books to hold even their cover price. How major? Try exponential.

Apply a little common sense. Sure, Valiant's readership is growing. But if it was growing that much, how is it you find tons of mint copies of most titles on every third dealer's table? If they were scarce enough to be worth 20 times cover price, the dealers would be sold out by now. *Wouldn't* they?

Comic book readership is *not* growing exponentially. And that's what it will take for these "hot" new titles to hold their value. They can't. They won't. Moral? It's an old one: Buy what you read, read only what you enjoy—and above all, pay only what a book is worth to *you.*

Because if you're buying new comics to put yourself or your child through college, you're fooling yourself. It's all *windhandel.* Just trading in the wind.

# CROW'S LIFE

***In his last interview, Brandon Lee reflects on a comics-spawned screen hero touched by vengeance.***

By DAN YAKIR

*This interview took place on March 25, 1993, in Wilmington, North Carolina, on the set of the comic-book gothic fantasy film* The Crow. *Five days later, Brandon Lee was accidentally killed by a bullet while shooting an action scene. He was 28 years old. This is the last time he spoke with a member of the press. During the conversation, repeated gunshots are heard in the background, as other scenes, or parts of scenes not requiring Lee's presence are being filmed.*

The Crow, *a dark, violent* film noir *based on James O'Barr's cult comic book (CS#25), was supposed to be his breakaway from the martial-arts movies that made him famous. On this film, Brandon Lee was making a conscious effort to step out of his father's shadow and find his own artistic path. Tragically, this was not to be.*

*Our interview was intended to take place in the car that took Lee from his rented house to the set—a huge abandoned cement factory. But that afternoon, the actor, his eyes hidden behind dark glasses, could barely utter a word. He was devastatingly tired. He had worked 19 hours the previous day, until 4 a.m., playing the intensely physical part of Eric Draven, a musician murdered by thugs who rises from the grave to avenge his murder so that he and his girl friend Shelly, who was killed with him, may rest in peace. The conversation finally took place after midnight, during a lensing break.*

*As Eric, Lee underwent a striking transformation: The white paint on his face and dark eye makeup made him look like a member of the rock group Kiss. He had to endure a two-hour makeup session every day, and a leather uniform completed his "look." In a scene I witnessed, he faces several cops who call on him to freeze, and then proceed to shoot him dozens of times. But he doesn't seek shelter: Since his character is already dead, bullets can't harm him.*

**COMICS SCENE:** What attracted you to *The Crow?*

**BRANDON LEE:** The purity of the character. It's a very personal story. As you know, it's a story about a man and the woman that he's very much in love with, who are both murdered—and he returns from the dead to hunt down the men who murdered them. It's a very pure story. I've done many things where there has been a great deal of action involved, but I've never done anything where I felt as justified in carrying out the action as I do in this. It also really appealed to me because of the situation that the character finds himself in, which is one that immediately proposes a number of questions to you: It's an insane situation, and if you were given the chance to come back after a year of being dead, you would be faced with some interesting dilemmas.

The core of this piece's tragedy is that if there was one person that you would want to speak to, one person that you would want to get in contact with again, after a year of being gone

(and you must assume that all the people that you knew have had a year now to get on with their lives, to deal somehow with the grief), the one person you would really want to get in touch with again would be the woman that you loved—your partner. And in this piece, she's *not there*.

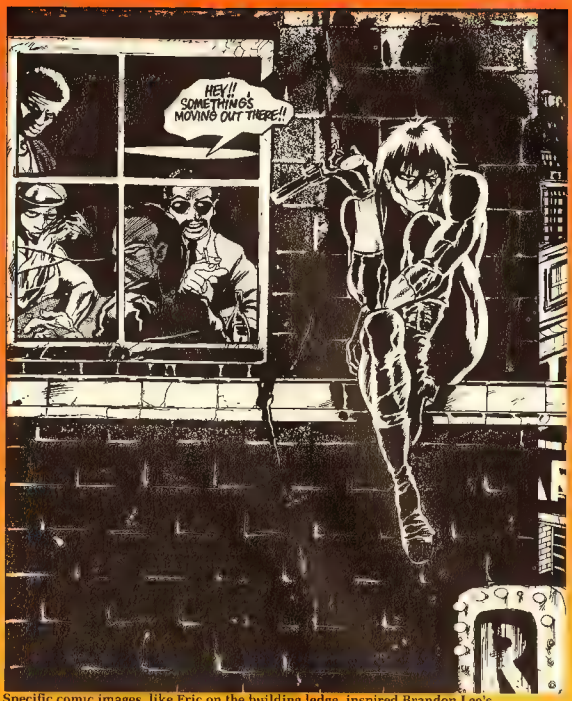
And you're dealing with a character who is really pushed by the situation that he's in—he's pushed to the limits of his sanity, and sometimes over them. So, it's a very complex character. And my favorite things about the script are the eloquent passages where he's given a chance to examine what he has become, and what he is becoming.

**CS**: Do you see the hero as a superhuman figure? He displays lyricism, but he obviously has a dark side too—the violence and vengeance.

**LEE**: He is after revenge, but this is *not Death Wish*. The situation is very different: He's not a living man who is stepping outside of the borders of the law in order to take his vengeance. He is something that he does not fully understand, and he is stepping outside the boundaries of *everything* that he understands, in the course of taking his vengeance. And that makes it a great deal more interesting to me than a vigilante piece would be.

**CS**: Does he become a sort of "force of nature"?

**LEE**: I don't think he becomes a force of nature. But there is certainly a very basic good vs. evil theme.




**Specific comic images, like Eric on the building ledge, inspired Brandon Lee's characterization of the Crow.**

*The Crow* was intended as Lee's breakaway film, relegating martial arts to the background.

All Showdown Photos. Copyright 1991 Warner Bros. Inc.

**CS**: So, you do see him as heroic?

**LEE**: Not from his own motivation, no. In the film, he ends up becoming involved in a situation that goes outside of his mission, which is simply to find these guys and kill them. And when that happens, he *does* become something of a heroic figure—because he involves himself in the affairs of the living world. That's what's heroic about him.

**CS**: Would you say, then, that by his very nature a hero must do something unselfish on behalf of someone else in order to qualify as a hero?

**LEE**: No, I don't think so. I just saw the best film I've seen in a while, *Lorenzo's Oil*; I really loved it. And you could say those people were doing everything purely for their son, not for the other children who were suffering from the same disease. However, their actions resulted in a cure for the disease, which helped hundreds of thousands of other children, right? And there's this wonderful line towards the film's end when Nick Nolte says to Susan Sarandon, "Did you ever stop and think that everything that we've done was for someone else's little boy?" And it was heartbreaking, because it was too late for their own son; I mean, they *did* save his life, but it came too late, whereas it was able to stop the progression of the disease in other children, and allowed them to live a very normal life.

That film was certainly very tragic and sad, but there was something very uplifting about the possibilities of the human spirit. And yet those people weren't really doing this, they were not just unbiased researchers looking for a cure for the disease; they were trying to save their own son. But through their actions they created something which you would certainly think of as being heroic.

At the heart of *The Crow* is the love that exists between Eric and Shelly, the two characters. That is what elevates this beyond a simple vigilante piece, and that is what must work to elevate it beyond an action film.

**CS**: Is there something about the character that you don't like, that you're critical of, or that you consider a character flaw?

LEE: I think the script is weighted a little bit heavily towards the action. The most interesting things about the script, to me, are the parts where the character is given a chance to try and cope with what has happened to him; the scenes where he's much more human than this "undead" avenger, where he's dealing with his own grief over having lost the woman he loves, his own life, all his friends, all his family. Everything that he had, he has lost. So even if he does kill this man, he's not really going to bring it all back. I'm hoping that the pieces in the film that aren't action sequences will be able to support the action sequences. What I would be most fearful of is that they won't, and it will be too much action.

CS: Do you think you've brought something you learned on earlier films to this one, physically and otherwise?

LEE: Absolutely. I did the fight choreography in *Rapid Fire* with Jeff Yamada, and he and I are doing the same for this one. I certainly learned a lot about that; I feel much more confident doing that now. *Rapid Fire* was the first time I had done it; I was much more apprehensive about it than I am on this film. And as an actor, I certainly learned a great deal.

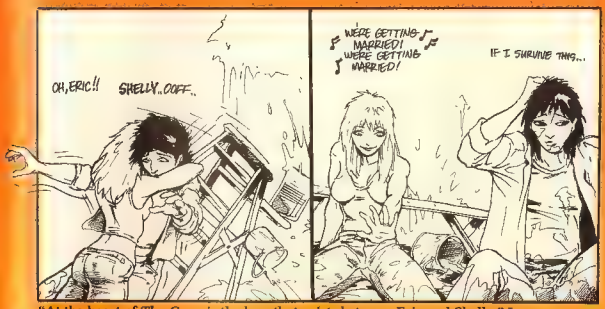
CS: Are you a fan of comic books?

LEE: Yeah, when I was a kid, I was a huge fan of comic books—I had quite an extensive collection. Lately, my rapport with comics has been through a couple of friends of mine who write comics. They also have a band that plays all over town, but also at some of the larger comic book and science fiction conventions. So I've gone down to a couple of those with the band.

As a kid, I liked the Hulk. The Hulk always had this tragic aspect about him because it was the classic Frankenstein story, or the Elephant Man. He was this man who hated turning into a monster. It's just something I've always responded to, this classic theme. In Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles, you have these vampires who bemoan the loss of their humanity. I have to tell you, personally I've always thought: "Wait a minute! I get to live forever; I'm essentially indestructible; I have supernatural powers; and I'm bitching about it?" [*Laughs.*]

And I think that if Eric hadn't lost Shelly, he wouldn't necessarily be such a tragic character. And there are certainly areas in the script that are a great deal of fun for me, particularly choreographing the action, because you're dealing with someone who doesn't have to play by the same rules a regular man would—you can do some very outlandish things with the choreography, like in this scene that we're shooting tonight. Eric is able to exploit his abilities, and do things a regular man couldn't do.

CS: In other words, he doesn't have to duck when he's shot at.




**"At the heart of *The Crow* is the love that exists between Eric and Shelly," Lee observed. "That is what elevates this beyond a simple vigilante piece."**

LEE: He's not particularly concerned about defense, you know?

CS: Given that, what did you come up with that was different?

LEE: Well, we've had some fun with the choreography—in each of the sequences where Eric has finally hunted down one of the guys responsible for Shelly's death—having Eric intimidate the living hell out of them by letting them hurt him (almost), just to show them that he *can't* be hurt, before he finishes them off.

CS: How do you play the living dead? This is not a George Romero-type movie where you're dealing with "creatures." How do you, as an actor, inject just enough life to keep the sense that this is an otherworldly thing?

LEE: Well, there's this quote from [Paul Bowles' novel] *The Sheltering Sky*, and the quote goes, "Because we do not know when we will die, we get to think about it as an inexhaustible life, and yet everything happens only a certain number of times—and they're a small number. How many more times will you remember a certain afternoon with your child? An afternoon that's so deep a part of your being that you can't conceive of your life without it. Perhaps four or five times more, perhaps not even that. How many more times will you watch the full moon? Perhaps...and yet it all seems endless..."

And the reason I bring that up is because we *don't* know when we will die. It's only in certain moments—such as having someone close to you pass away, or having an experience [close to] death—that you're really brought face to face with how fragile your life is, and therefore how meaningful each moment of life is. But the majority of

Photo: Robert Isenberg

**"As an actor, I certainly learned a great deal from [*Rapid Fire*]," said Lee, here with co-star Kate Hodge.**

Lee compared *The Crow* to *Rapid Fire*. Both were "over-the-top action movies."

the time, so many things pass you by. For Eric, as a character, it's not the least intimately coherent that nothing is trivial; and each moment that he has, in these two or three days that he has been given to come back, is very precious. And very simple things that a living person wouldn't even notice, or would pass by, have the power to really capture his attention and fascinate him, because he's very aware that he will never see them again.

**CS:** And in terms of expressing emotion, is he emotionally alive?

**LEE:** He's emotionally hyper-alive, I believe. Because of what I've just said, every moment, each object he comes in contact with, anything a person says, carries with it this tremendous weight because he realizes that each of those moments is *never* going to happen again. That's equally valid for a living person, but we're always focused on some distant goal.

**CS:** And his appearance, is it just a notion? Not something he wears as an identifying mark?

**"It's not that I don't like doing martial-arts films; it's that I would like the opportunity to do many different types of films."**

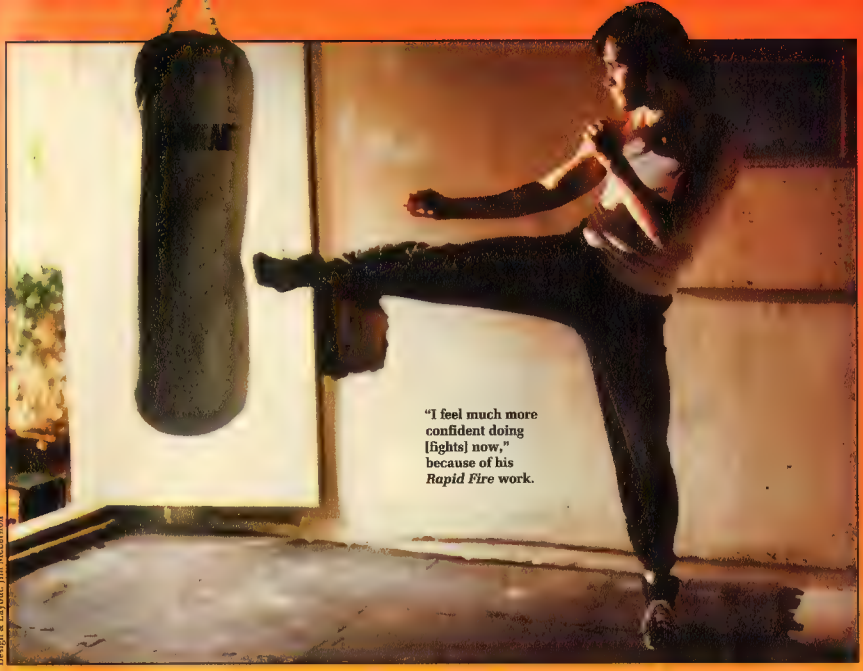
**LEE:** Well, we have Eric wearing makeup. When he first comes back, the sheer nature of his situation almost overwhelms him—he almost becomes catatonic, growing completely insane, being unable to function due to his awesome situation. One of the things that is in the story, to help him deal with the situation, is creating this persona of the Crow through the makeup he puts on in order to create someone who's able to deal with the situation.

**CS:** Can you elaborate on the myth the movie creates, with his coming to life for this particular purpose?

**LEE:** Essentially, what has to work is that the love that Eric and Shelly had was very special, that somehow it's the *power* of this love that brings him back in order to redress the wrongs that were done.

**CS:** Everybody involved in the film says you had a great deal of input into the character. What do you recall as your input or your strong feelings about specific notions? They were all very impressed, and say that by your presence, you helped shape who the character was.

**LEE:** I don't really recall that kind of input. I just worked on Eric, and per-



"I feel much more confident doing [fights] now," because of his *Rapid Fire* work.

Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

haps some of the things that I suggested made it into the script.

**CS:** How difficult is the character to portray, to get into that mood?

**LEE:** It's certainly a challenge for me. It's the most dramatic piece I've had a chance to do, and I'm grateful for that.

**CS:** Do you stay in character more than you would have, say, on *Rapid Fire*?

**LEE:** You know, I find that I'm *always* finding ways to work, and certainly fantasy really is the work on this film.

**CS:** Did you basically discover it by trial and error?

**LEE:** Yes.

**CS:** Can you tell me what it is?

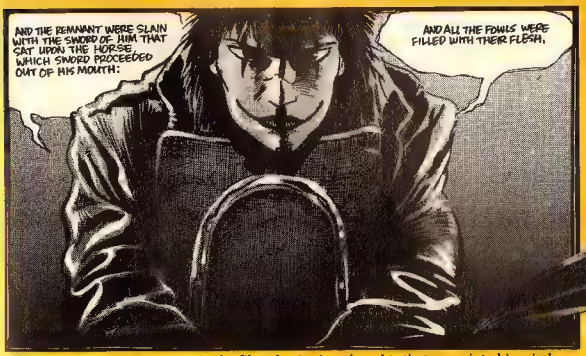
**LEE:** Well, I would really like to keep that between myself and the walls of my trailer. [Gunshots sound in the background.] I have certain superstitions about that.

**CS:** Can you elaborate on the changes in the character from James O'Barr's original comic-book version?

**LEE:** All the elements of the character [were there]. It's almost as if Eric has two or maybe three very distinct personalities in the comic: There is the Eric Draven who grieves for his loss when he's alone; then there's the Eric Draven who's this supernatural avenger filled with hate; or an angel wearing the persona of the Crow, who goes on to find those responsible. The challenge of the piece was to make it moving.

**CS:** Do you feel...[sound of gunshots]...I mean, is this an interpretation of Eric as the Crow? Or do you feel that this is actually the way the script is portraying him? I think this is your analysis of who he is, isn't it?

**LEE:** Yes, this is my analysis of who he is. Now, how much of that ends up


AND THE REMNANT WERE SLAIN WITH THE SWORD OF HIM THAT SAT UPON THE HORSE, WHICH SWORD PROCEEDED OUT OF HIS MOUTH:
AND ALL THE FOWLS WERE FILLED WITH THEIR FLESH.

"When Eric is reciting poetry in the film, they're just thoughts that come into his mind and seem to match."

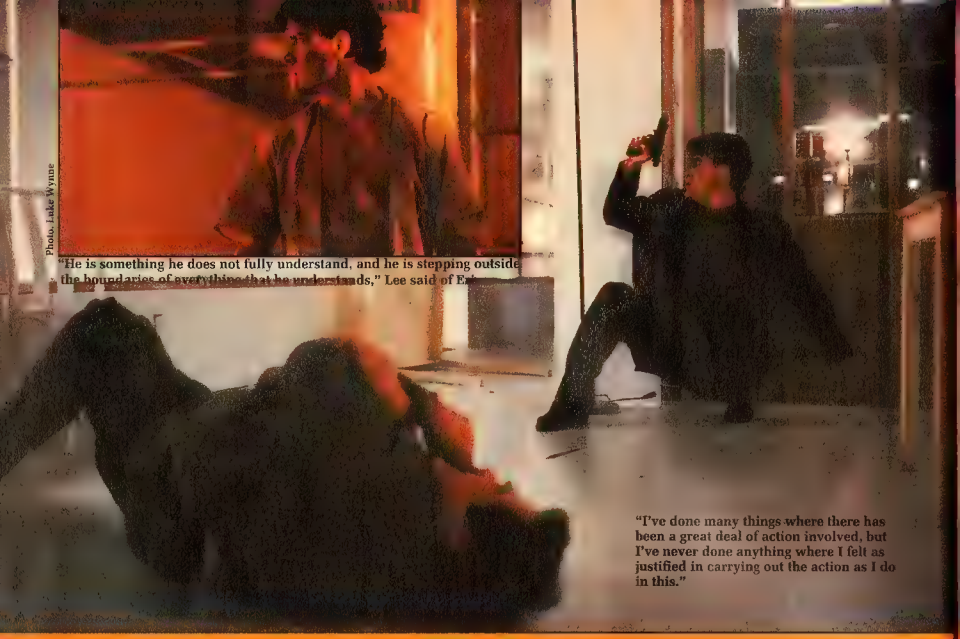


Photo: Luke Wynne

"He is something he does not fully understand, and he is stepping outside the boundaries of everything that he understands," Lee said of Eric.

"I've done many things where there has been a great deal of action involved, but I've never done anything where I felt as justified in carrying out the action as I do in this."

coming through in the finished product, I mean...I would like for everyone who sees the film to feel the same way about the character that I do, but I know that that's *not* reality. I can't tell you how much of it is [my own interpretation].

**CS:** Reading the script, there seems to be a sense of community between Sarah [the little girl who visits the grave], Albrecht [the friendly cop] and Eric as well. Maybe that's the counterpart of that corrupt criminal netherworld that dominates the whole thing. Can you elaborate on that?

**LEE:** Yeah, I mean, this is where Eric used to live. He knows these people, he knows these streets, this is his neighborhood. I mean, even if you've ever moved away from a place and then come back years later, it's like putting on an old pair of gloves—you remember all the places you used to go, the people who worked there, you want to go by and see if this place is still here...'Oh my God, they've turned it into a laundromat!' And there's certainly an element of this for Eric. He's discovering his old community, and that's also [part of the tragedy] of the character—that, even though it's all right there in front of him, he's not a part of it.

**CS:** What does the fact that he's a musician contribute? His being a creative person?

**LEE:** It's all in your point-of-view. If you were to know that something that you dearly loved—for me, it would be acting; for Eric, it's his music—if you were to know that everything that you put into it had come to naught in the end... I think the few times that Eric [gets near] a guitar—as I say, it's all in your point-of-view: It's either terribly tragic, or absolutely wonderful!

**CS:** Physically speaking, I'm sure you did many of your own stunts again. What did you have to go through?

**LEE:** Eric endures some real physical hardships.

**CS:** Did you get hurt?

**LEE:** No, I've been very fortunate—I haven't gotten hurt yet. I guess the most important thing that I've been dealing with has really been the cold. It's very funny, because I had this idea about Eric that when he first came back from the dead he would be freezing cold, because I thought that his actual physical body temperature would slowly rise as he spent more time in the world of the living and got worse, freezing cold, and almost have a sense of rigor mortis about his movements that slowly wears off, as life came back to him. So when I prepared for this part, I took about 10 or 12 big bags of ice and covered myself with them; then my girl friend stopwatched me—I wanted to see how long it would take to get to a certain place with the cold. I worked with this for a while, and then I came to the set, and I got into this big argument with one of the producers about the bags of ice, because he said that if I were to get sick from doing this, the production would not be able to [continue]. The insurance company would be upset and wouldn't cover us.

In the end, it was decided that I would be allowed to do it in my trailer—it would be my responsibility and no one would know about it; and when they were ready to roll, they would come and get me and I would come rushing out and do the scene, freezing to death. So, we got the ice and we were ready to do it, and the first two or three nights that we shot, it was Eric coming out of the grave...and it was about five degrees outside! So, right away the whole thing went out the window. But fortunately, I think it worked really well.

**CS:** How much are you willing to risk doing your own stunts?

**LEE:** I'm really a firm believer that no matter how big the action pieces are, nobody should get hurt. Safety is a very important consideration. I'm not one of those people who think that you have to hit people to make it look realistic. That's a very ignorant point-of-view. And stuntmen, they're so tough all the time: A stuntman can do a stunt and get both of his legs blown off, and

On *Showdown in Little Tokyo*, Lee and Dolph Lundgren shared "a great chemistry."

Photos: Lisa Wynne All Rights Reserved Photos Copyright 1992 20th Century Fox

he would drag himself along the floor with his hands and say, 'I'm fine, I'm fine. Get ready for the next one!" [*chuckles*] I think those guys are great, but I don't think anybody has to get hurt. But, yeah, when you do that kind of work there's very little margin for error—sometimes you're missing by inches. Sometimes you have a miscalculation, or sometimes something goes wrong and somebody'll get tagged.

**CS:** What are some of the stunts you did, or insisted on doing?

**LEE:** I really haven't done anything extraordinary. Most of it is I'm getting shot a lot, but it's not really demanding. Usually, the hero of the piece really can't get shot, you know, or if he does, he gets winged on the shoulder towards the end. In a scene that we shot [recently], I get shot 60 or 70 times!

**CS:** Arnold Schwarzenegger devised a strategy for crossing over from action films to other types of movies.

**LEE:** I must say, I'm not that manipulative. I don't like to think, "Well, next I'll do a comedy and people won't expect that, and then..." I find myself in a position—which is very nice—of having people send me scripts for the first time in my career. And I'm really just trying to take them one at a time, and look for something I feel I can give some heart to, not to say, "Next I'll do a comedy."

**CS:** Would you like to play a strictly dramatic part, say, a business exec?

**LEE:** Yes, very much so.

**CS:** Do you feel that *The Crow*, because it isn't strictly an action movie, is a step in that direction, of doing something different?

**LEE:** Yeah, I'm pleased with this. As I said, there is still a great deal of action in the film. It's not martial-arts action—not at all. The character is not a martial artist, and doesn't know the first thing about martial arts. So, even that is a step in the right direction for me. And I just want to say, it's not that I don't like doing martial-arts films; it's that I would like the opportunity to do many different types of films, you know? I would be happy to go back and do another martial-arts film at some point in the future, but in between I would like the chance to do other things as well...and this is one of them!

**CS:** On *The Crow*, did you turn to the original comic for inspiration, or was the script enough for you?

**LEE:** No, I did a great deal. You know, comic books are images—they're totally frozen images. And there were some wonderful images that I wanted to try and get into the film. And there are some actual images from the comic book which I tried to duplicate, because I thought they were wonderful.

**A family portrait looks back on happier times: Lee, as a child, with his parents, Linda and Bruce Lee.**

Just as an example, there's a scene where Eric is perched on a ledge listening to a conversation in another room, and just the way he was perched with one leg held up, his arms wrapped around the leg, and he's kind of dangling off to the sides, his head forward and his eyes looking up...I thought it was a beautiful image, so I played it exactly like that. I put myself in that exact position for the shot.

**CS:** There's a great deal of actual (bloody) violence in *The Crow*. What's your feeling about that?

**LEE:** It's a very, very violent film. But like I said, it has a justification.

**CS:** George Romero pointed out that his movies are fantasy violence, as opposed to realistic violence *á là* Clint Eastwood, say, where the punches are real—you know, you see a zombie take a bite out of someone: This is not real. Any thoughts about the whole notion of fantasy and realistic violence?

**LEE:** You mean socially conscious thoughts? I think that the violence in a piece should match its tone. If you're George Romero doing a piece about zombies coming back from the dead, you've already crossed over the line into fantasy, and at that point the type of action should be suited to fit the tone of the piece.

*Rapid Fire*, for example, was an over-the-top action movie—it wasn't my idea or Jeff's or the director's idea of what an actual fight would look like. It was an artistic attempt to portray martial-arts action in a very exciting, flashy way. This film falls into that category as well. Because we have the chance to deal with someone who has supernatural powers, it gives us a great deal of license with the action.

**CS:** Does the film's highly stylized quality affect the acting at all?

**LEE:** I'll tell you what has affected the nature of the acting, which is quite interesting. It's the makeup that I'm wearing. Eric creates this persona of the Crow for himself, and when I'm playing Eric as the Crow with the makeup on, it's just a wonderful opportunity, because the gloves are off—there are no rules. *You* tell me how somebody who comes back from the dead behaves, you know? As long as it's behavior that's coming from a truthful place inside you, I don't think there's anything that's wrong for this character to do.

It's very liberating; I mean, the character quotes poetry in the midst of an action sequence! And I don't think that's invalid for him to do. He's not operating on the same principles that a regular person is. I don't think it's invalid for him to burst into laughter or tears in any given moment, over nothing. It's a really wonderful opportunity, and I'm doing my damnedest to make the most of it.

**CS:** Are you saying that the minute you put the makeup on, you already feel the transformation?

**LEE:** Certainly, yes. It makes you feel a certain sense of otherness. And it's funny, because sometimes you almost forget that you look different! [*Laughs.*] It's always like that: You put on a pair of nice black leather gloves, and suddenly, you feel a sense of power in your hands, in your gestures. Whenever I put on gloves, I feel like I can hit somebody, you know what I mean?

**CS:** How does the costume reflect the character?

**LEE:** The costume is basically just some of Eric's old clothes that he finds.

**CS:** What about the element about him where he takes something from each victim he eliminates?

**LEE:** There's kind of a ritualistic, totemistic feel to it. There's a line that came purely from the comic book, where Eric, after having killed one of the guys, took a spent shell casing from his gun and tied it in his hair. And, in the comic, the line was "To build a temple to sadness, he ties a spent shell casing in his hair. 'One,' he says." And I think that's the influence for Eric collecting an item from each person.

**"The purity of the character" attracted Lee to *The Crow*.**

**CS:** Do you feel there are echoes of Edgar Allan Poe and *The Raven*?

**LEE:** The piece touches on many things like that. I mean, I'm quoting poetry from Poe and others. For some reason, I personally remember song lyrics—I always do. I can't help it; if I hear a song once, I know all the lyrics from the song. And when I'm driving or performing some other repetitive, mindless activity, I tend to recite song lyrics to myself that usually seem appropriate to the situation.

And to me, when Eric is reciting poetry in the film, they're just thoughts that come into his mind and seem to match. He was a songwriter in his life, he was a road man, and I think that he has stored up in his mind hundreds and hundreds of lyrics from songs and pieces from different poetry that he has read. And he uses those to express what's going on with him at different times in the film.

**CS:** Tell me about working with the director, Alex Proyas.

**LEE:** He has a really, really strong visual sense. He's bringing a truly great look to this film. He's a very stylistic filmmaker, you know—like the early Ridley Scott or Joel Schumacher films had a very definite look to them. And Alex is doing a fantastic job in creating a very definite look for this film. It's very dark, literally and emotionally.

**CS:** Any other special problems about *The Crow*?

**LEE:** I've had to keep reminding myself of the situation constantly in playing this part, simply because sometimes it's easy to lapse into thinking that you are alive, and that the character you're playing is a man—but that's not the case. In the scene we're shooting right now, when the cops come in through the door, and train their guns on Eric and tell him to freeze, we did an interesting thing late last night.

The cops trained their guns on me and said, "Freeze!," and I did this kind of Looney Tunes dance [*giggles*] out of the room, as opposed to a more traditional turning and running. Because the fact of the matter is that Eric doesn't have to do that, you know? There's no reason he wouldn't do a Looney Tunes dance out the door. [*Laughs.*] And we've had many times where I've suggested things to Alex, and he has looked at me for a second like, "You're kidding?" [*Laughs.*] And then we've managed to get them into the film.

**CS:** Given the nature of the part and the late hours, can you just take off the makeup after work and go to sleep, or does it take a few hours of unwinding?

**LEE:** Well, the majority of the time, by the time I get home, I'm so tired that I just go to sleep—to tell you the truth.

**CS:** But you feel fulfilled?

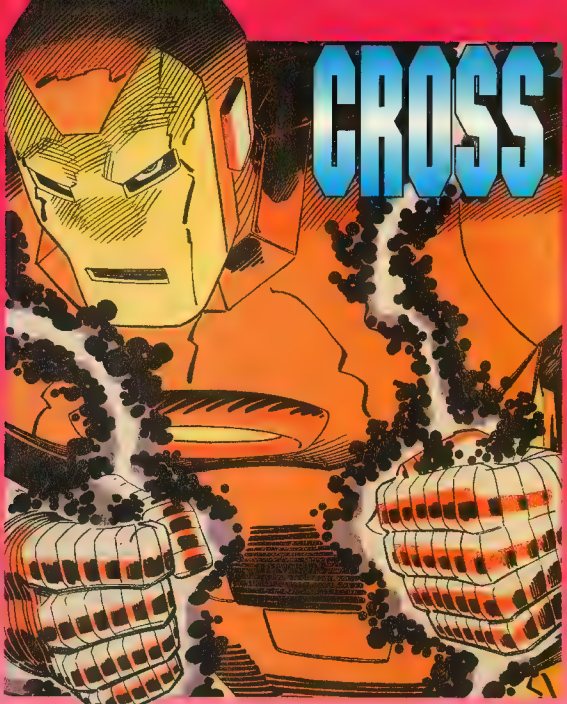
**LEE:** Yeah, most of the time.

**A longtime comics fan, Lee was one of the forces behind the making of *The Crow*. He *really* wanted to play the character.**

**"We don't know when we will die," Lee said, noting that Eric Draven returns from the dead to redress great wrongs.**

All Crow Photos: Robert Zuckerman/Miramax Films

# CROSS OF IRON



Art: John Romita Jr./Mark Wacek

## *Filmmaker Stuart Gordon won't let the Iron Man movie rust in peace.*

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

Marvel Comics' heroes have never quite clicked in Hollywood. OK, Hulk was a hit, but Spider-Man, Captain America, Dr. Strange, Thor, Howard the Duck, Punisher and Daredevil were all disappointments.

Still, they're luckier than most Marvel heroes. Take the case of Tony Stark: With the exception of a '60s cartoon—in which *Animal House*'s John Vernon voiced "the cool exec with a heart of steel"—Iron Man has been virtually ignored by Tinseltown. He's one of Marvel's longest-running characters, and still appears in three books a month—his own title and two *Avengers*. He has his own action figure from Toy Biz. And *Terminator 2* director James Cameron has professed that as a child, he wanted "to grow up and draw Iron Man." Nevertheless, the Golden Avenger is currently rusting in peace.

One filmmaker has been trying to get Iron Man onto the silver screen. On the wall of Stuart Gordon's office is a framed Iron Man poster by Moebius with the inscription "To Stupendous Stu, Much Admiration, Excelsior! Stan Lee."

"I've been working on an Iron Man film, trying to get that to happen, but it's kind of betwixt and between right now," the director of *Re-Animator* explains. "We originally wanted to do it with Universal, but we couldn't get a script that everybody agreed upon. An Iron Man movie still *might* happen."

Gordon may be the perfect director for the project, since his film *Robot Jox* was reminiscent of the classic Cold War Iron Man stories, where Shellhead squares off against Russian foes like the Crimson Dynamo in front of the media. (One Robotjock even makes like Ben Grimm and says, "It's clobberin' time!")

"That's true," Gordon laughs. "There are some similarities. I was very influenced by Marvel Comics. Through *Iron Man*, I've gotten to know Stan Lee, which has been a great treat. It's wonderful to get into story conferences with him because he knows his characters so well.

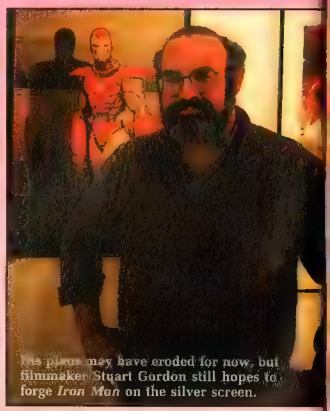
"Stan's like a kid; he gets excited about things and builds upon them. You'll toss out an idea, and that will inspire Stan to come up with an even better one, which is nice. Stan's very positive. You get many guys who say, 'This is no good and that's no good,' but Stan never says that. After awhile, you realize that when he doesn't like an idea, you have to coax him into saying it."

Recently, Iron Man was scrapped in a way Ultimo, the Mandarin and the Melter could never have dreamed of: He was sent into turnaround.

"Universal, for cost-saving measures, had all these projects in development, and basically dumped 300 of them," Gordon says sadly. "Part of the problem with Iron Man was we couldn't come up with a script that satisfied them.

"I also think *The Rocketeer* had a negative effect," he states. "If *Rocketeer* had been a more successful film, it would have helped *Iron Man*. It worried Universal because they saw it as too similar."

The Rocketeer's helmet even resembles one of Iron Man's earlier headpieces from the comics. "It really does," Gordon concurs. "Developing a



His plans may have eroded for now, but filmmaker Stuart Gordon still hopes to forge *Iron Man* on the silver screen.

suit that can make you fly is basically the same idea. But I felt Iron Man had many other things to offer that *The Rocketeer* didn't. Tony Stark needs the suit in order to live, and that makes him more vulnerable—which is one of the things *The Rocketeer* lacked. You were never concerned about the hero.

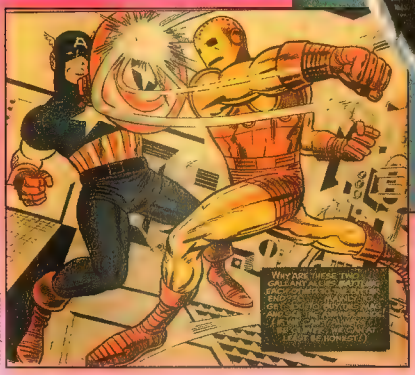
"He seemed to be just the same at the end as in the beginning. In a good movie, the hero should learn or go through something; he has to change, to take the audience somewhere.

"You can't really get too upset when a project gets put into turnaround because just about every successful movie was in turnaround, including *E.T.* and *Star Wars*. Many times, a company will throw the baby out with the bathwater."

Gordon feels very protective of his baby. "*Iron Man* was a project I had been talking about for several years,

Art: Bob Larkin

**If Gordon's *Iron Man* movie ever happens, it won't matter which costume he wears, but "you have to have all of the repulsor rays."**




Art: Jack Kirby

**Gordon once planned to have Shellhead's armor for the *Iron Man* movie resemble this Jack Kirby '60s rendition.**

and I finally found somebody who liked the idea. We went to Marvel Comics, where they agreed to license it to us for an option, with the condition that Stan would be involved to make sure we were faithful to the comics, and do an adaptation Marvel would be proud of. I welcomed that and thought it would be great.

"What I like about Iron Man is that Tony Stark is a very wealthy man, but he has bad health. It's the old idea that 'There are some things money cannot buy.' There's a vulnerability about him. He has got this bad heart and Iron Man began as a way to keep his heart beating regularly, then eventually metamorphoses into this suit that he can wear which gives him super powers.

"It's a wonderful fantasy," Gordon notes. "The idea that anyone who puts on this suit can fly and lift up bulldozers. To do these great things is amazing, but at the same time, you have a man in the suit whose heart could fail at any second. It gives him an Achilles heel, which makes him an interesting hero."

As for casting Stark, "I never settled on a final person, but the direction we were going was that Iron Man had retired and stopped being Iron Man. As in the comics, he has become an alcoholic, and then he must put on the suit and become Iron Man again. We were thinking it would be great to get someone like Clint Eastwood or Paul Newman, as kind of an older hero, as opposed to a younger guy."

The film's story will be epic. "I'll be working with the writer, I don't think I would write it myself. [*RoboCop* co-author] Michael Miner was involved, but Michael wanted to take it in a completely different direction, one that didn't really work for me. I had been working with Stan and [comics writer] Roy Thomas, developing a scenario together.

"Roy brought a lot of Iron Man lore to the project," Gordon declares. "He's really familiar with Marvel, of course. He brought back the character of Obadiah Stane, some of the backstories and Rhodey [Tony Stark's bodyguard]. Rhodey will definitely be in it. Generally, we're getting back to the comic."

Like most superhero films, this one would retell Iron Man's origin. But there's a problem with a faithful rendering of those events—they're dated. Tony Stark's story began in Vietnam. "We decided not to get into that," Gordon explains. "Our story was that the stress of running Stark Industries gets to Tony Stark and he has a major heart attack. This is brought about by his rival trying a corporate takeover. We were talking about making [the rival] Stane from the comics, which was Roy's idea. Of course, in the Marvel tradition, Stane turns out to have been a pawn of some other great villain."

Gordon wanted a foe who would thrill audiences from here to Latveria. "We were developing different villains, although the one I wanted to use was Dr. Doom. I always thought

he would be the perfect nemesis for Iron Man. Unfortunately, Dr. Doom was sold to another producer along with the Fantastic Four.

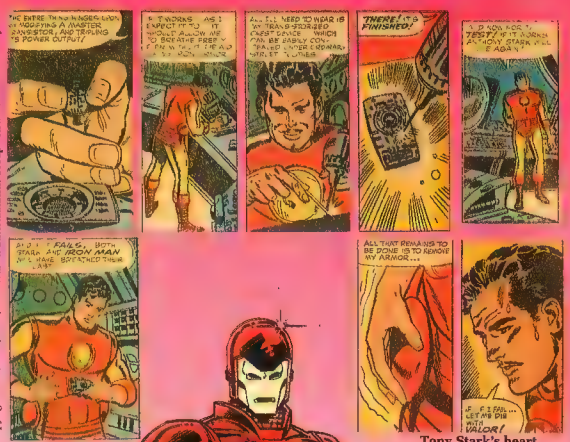
"We cooked up our own villain. We gave him several different names; at one point, we were calling him Doctor Death. It was the idea of a guy who had been destroyed and rebuilt himself, like Dr. Doom.

"It's important that you have a villain who's equal or better, in terms of power, to your hero. If you have a worthy adversary, all the better. Alfred Hitchcock used to say, 'The better the villain, the better the movie.' I think that's good advice."

Such artists as Jack Kirby, Moebius and Bob Layton have created distinctive Iron Man outfits—so, which style did the filmmakers have in mind for the movie? "The script starts with the origin of Iron Man, and we wanted to start with the really old, original Iron Man suit, which looked like Robby the Robot, and have it develop into something more like the [present] one in the comic. He'll computerize it with all sorts of microtechnology, and refine it to make it much more compact."

The director also believes Iron Man should retain his gadgets from the comic. "You have to have all of the repulsor rays, but again, you have to make it believable to an audience. You have to sell the technology and make the suit seem really possible."

Iron Man's appearance in any potential movie may be rather unusual. "[Artist] Neal Adams designed a new Iron Man suit," Gordon reveals. "The thing that's great about Neal is that he designs things so they could work. One of the big problems with Iron Man is the armor suit folds into a briefcase. When Tony Stark puts on the suit, what happens to the briefcase? That was something I never thought about. Does he leave the briefcase there? Neal incorporated the briefcase *into* the costume. It becomes a part of his costume, which was ingenious."


THE ENTIRE THING HINGES UPON MOUSING A MASTER SABOTEUR, AND TRIPLING ITS POWER OUTPUT!
I'M THINKING AND I EXPECT IT TO WITHOUT ALLOWING TO SUFFOCATE FREE
I'LL NEED TO WEAR IS TRANSFIGURED SPACE WHICH CAN BE EASILY CONTAINED UNDER EDWARD
THERE! IT'S FINISHED!
AND NOW FOR A TEST OF IT'S DESIGN AS TONY STARK WILL AGAIN!
FAILS, BOTH STARK AND IRON MAN HAVE BEEN METALLO THEIR
ALL THAT REMAINS TO BE DONE IS TO REMOVE MY ARMOR...
IF IT FAILS... LET HIS DIE QUICKLY!

**Tony Stark's heart "could fail at any second," making him a hero who's very intriguing to Gordon.**

**"The Iron Man suit is what it's really about," says Gordon.**

As a reader, Gordon enjoyed Marvel Comics for their verisimilitude. "I always loved that in *Dr. Strange*, at the end of some great adventure, where he has just saved the universe from Dormammu, he would come back to New York, a cab would drive by, splash water all over him and the driver would yell, 'Get outta the street, ya freak!' Strange would always have that little thought bubble, 'If they only knew!' The idea that this guy saved all of us, we owe him our existence, and nobody knew about it was great."

While there have been a number of writers attached to *Iron Man*, including *RoboCop*'s Miner, at one point Gordon brought in his fellow Empire Pictures' alumni, screenwriters Danny Bilson and Paul De Meo (who discussed *The Flash* in CS #26).

"We were doing *Iron Man*, but had to drop out to do *The Flash*," Danny Bilson says. Paul De Meo relates, "Our story started with Tony Stark retired, as a bummed-out alcoholic. He hasn't been Iron Man for 10 years; he's 50 years old and becomes Iron Man again with a whole new suit."

Gordon's *Iron Man* remains in limbo while he pursues other projects (like the forthcoming *Space Truckers*). Meanwhile, an animated weekly *Iron Man* series is being prepared for broadcast this fall. TV's *Starman* Robert Hays will voice the hero.

But is there any other comic character Stuart Gordon would like to adapt? "Well," he states with a noncommittal grin, "I wouldn't mind seeing Doctor Strange brought to the screen!" CS

All Iron Man Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1964, 1979, 1991, 1992 Marvel Entertainment Group Art: Don Heck/Dick Ayers
Art: Mark Bright/Bob Layton

# Fantastic RADIO

By RICH HARVEY

OBEY ME, MY PUPPETS! FOR MY WILL IS YOUR WILL! YOU SHALL NEVER ESCAPE YOUR NEW MASTER!
I CAN'T HELP MYSELF! THE PUPPET-MASTER IS MAKING ME ATTACK THE OTHERS!
DON'T, THING! WE MUSTN'T LET HIM CONTROL US!

All Fantastic Four Art Colors: Glynis Oliver Art: Jack Kirby

***They fought evil on the airwaves—but who remembers the Marvel Comics Radio Series?***

While fans patiently wait for a live-action *Fantastic Four* movie, and debate the merits of the two animated TV versions, *The Marvel Comics Radio Series* remains largely overlooked and forgotten, even by Marvel's staff. The radio series debuted in 1975, following the *daily* adventures of the Fantastic Four, and its disappearance from the airwaves came as quietly as the first broadcast.

The program started innocently enough, series producer Peter B. Lewis recalls from his West Coast home, while Lewis was working for a Long Island radio station in the early '70s. He had been a disc jockey for numerous West Coast radio stations before moving to New York in 1964.

"I was writing radio jingles at the time," says Lewis, "and Robert Michelson, the syndicator of the series, came to me and Richard Clorfene with the idea of producing a Marvel Comics radio series. By chance, I became friends with a jingle-singer whose girl friend worked at Marvel, and she reacted enthusiastically towards the idea."

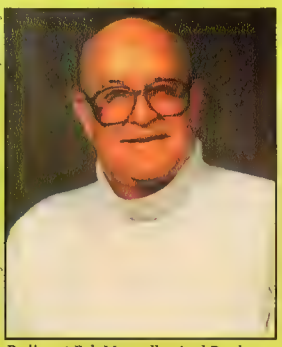
Apparently, she spoke to the right people, for legalities were ironed out soon thereafter. Lewis and Clorfene approached Stan Lee, then Marvel's editor-in-chief, about adapting comic book scripts for the series.

"They asked if they could do a *Fantastic Four* radio show," Lee recalls, "and I thought it was a great idea. For years, I had thought it would be a terrific idea to dramatize our stories on the radio or to make records of them. But that's not our business, and I never really got into it. So, when these fellows called and made the offer, I said, 'Let's do it.' "

LITTLE DO THEY KNOW THAT THEY WILL SOON BE AT THE MERCY OF THE SUB-MARINER!
THE END OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
FANTASTIC FOUR EVICTED FROM BUILDING!
HEROES ONE MINUTE—HOMELESS THE NEXT! HOW DO IT HAPPEN TO US?!?

Art: Jack Kirby

Photo: Courtesy Bob Maxwell



Radio vet Bob Maxwell voiced Reed Richards, leader of the Fantastic Four.

*The Marvel Comics Radio Series* was nationally syndicated and broadcast in 1975 in a format consisting of five five-minute episodes per week. Listeners were expected to tune in on Monday for part one, and listen until Friday's installment wrapped the week's adventure. "Originally, we wanted to do *The Silver Surfer*," says Lewis. "That's my big interest in Marvel from the get-go, and that's why Richard Clorfene got involved. But I decided we would do *The Fantastic Four*, since that's Marvel's foundation, and then we would do other characters."

Murray/Scrooged Photo: Copyright 1988 Paramount Pictures

**Flaming on as the Human Torch was a young Bill Murray.** Art: Jack Kirby/Joe Sinnott

Scripts were adapted from the earliest Stan Lee/Jack Kirby classics, to capture the flavor of '60s comics. Following a crash reading of *The Fantastic Four*, however, Lewis realized the problem in bringing them to radio.

"The first thing we had to do was throw out stories that were completely visual," says Lewis. "In the first 13 weeks, we had gone through the first *25* magazines. Imagine the difficulty in trying to get Dr. Doom to talk through Reed Richards' voice, from one issue—technically, it would have been a *nightmare*. Those little glimmers of description, so that the audience understands what's happening, obviously *weren't* in the magazines, because that stuff is visual."

Scripts began as minor rewrites, keeping the words almost exactly as in the original comics, and were then condensed slightly to fit a 25-minute time frame. Three months later, Lewis put the finishing touches on "The Fantastic Four Meet the Mole-Man," "The Menace of the Miracle-Man," "The Sub-Mariner Strikes," "Prisoners of Doctor Doom," "Pawns of the Puppet Master," "In the Clutches of Doctor Doom," "The Super-Skrull Walks Among Us," "At the Mercy of Rama Tut," "The Menace of the Red Ghost" and "The Sub-Mariner Strikes."

"I had done enough work with Jerry Terheyden to know that he was diverse enough to play *all* of the villains," says Lewis. "But one of the problems with an ensemble cast is that, sooner or later, you're gonna have the characters talking to each other, with one actor [doing *both* characters]. You can expect that problem when doing a radio show."

A similar problem befell Cynthia Adler, a woman with much experience in cartoon-looping, when she starred as the Invisible Girl. "Sue Storm wasn't very demanding, so Adler also played Alicia Masters and Ant-Man [in "The Micro-World of Doctor Doom"], and she did really well with that."

Golden-throated announcer Bob Maxwell had done voice-overs for numerous commercials and TV specials. "I knew he could act, and he played on *The Lone Ranger*, *The Green Hornet* and *Sgt. Preston of the Yukon*. He's a true radio veteran. From the outset, I knew I wanted Bob for Reed Richards, and Bill Murray [yes, *that* Bill Murray] for Johnny Storm. I wanted Murray to play Johnny Storm because I thought he had a very unique voice. I had always liked him, and he had this enthusiasm and seniority in his voice."

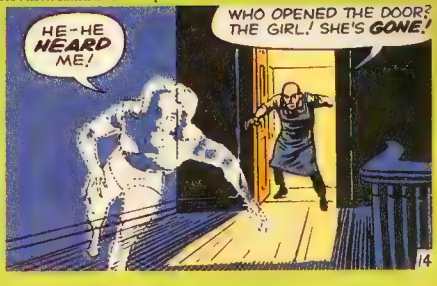
Lewis met the up-and-coming comedian after being involved with *The National Lampoon Radio Hour*, another program syndicated by Robert Michelson. When that series concluded its national run, Lewis approached Murray—who has since, of course, starred on *Saturday Night Live* and made numerous films like *Ghostbusters*—with the offer to play the Human Torch.

"Bill had never heard of *The Fantastic Four*," says Lewis, "had barely heard of Marvel Comics, and *never*

Art: Jack Kirby/Art Simek

**Though John Belushi wanted the job, Jim Pappas got to sound off as the Thing.**

All Fantastic Four Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1961, 1962, 1963, 1987, 1992 Marvel Entertainment Group




Art: Jack Kirby, Art Simek

**Cynthia Adler voiced Sue Storm, the Invisible Girl.**

read the scripts in advance. He never knew what the hell was goin' on. I ended up recording a bunch of lines with him alone, so that the words were on tape somewhere. I don't think this was the crowning glory of his acting career, but he was himself. You can see in the movies he has done since then what kind of guy he is. He's just acting his life."

When Murray became involved, another *National Lampoon Radio Hour* veteran (and future *SNL* co-star) got interested, too. "John Belushi came to me and asked if he could play the Thing," Lewis recalls, "and I chose to decline. I wanted *The Fantastic Four* to have its own unique sound, and I was afraid that, if Belushi and Murray were both involved, people would think it was another edition of the *National Lampoon*. I think I made the right choice.

"I auditioned about a half-dozen people to play Ben Grimm, and Jim Pappas was the winner. I don't think he was an actor, or that he had any experience on the microphone before playing the Thing. He was just some guy that the agent sent over.

"Still, I know I made the right choices with the cast, and they all performed *brilliantly*, considering that I had a week to get these things done."

The producers chose Stan Lee as the series' narrator, a natural bit of casting since the scripts were all adapted from the original Lee/Kirby issues. However, brought in for the dramatic readings, Lee constantly stumbled over his own words. He didn't fluently speak Marvel-ese—"Face Front, True Believers" and "Make Mine Marvel," for example.

"Stan kept looking up from the mike and asking, 'Did I write this?' I showed him what he had written and how I modified it to make it a little easier and fun for the ear.

"You can probably tell at times that he's struggling through the copy. He's a writer, after all, *not* a reader. We did a good job of recording him and editing the good takes together, but now, anybody who doesn't recognize Stan Lee's voice wonders *why* we used him."

The dialogue among all of the actors was recorded within a week-and-a-half, so that Lewis could return to Seattle, where he and his wife had relocated and where post-production took place.

"It was hard to do that show," Lewis sighs, "and keep it interesting for 65 episodes. Just about every place had an ambient sound effect—Reed's laboratory, the Mole Man's cave, Dr. Doom's castle. Radio allows you to give a sense of place, so besides descriptive information, I tried to create atmospheres for each place, which wasn't easy.

"I looked at the image of the Fantastic Four flare-gun, and couldn't figure out what it would be, but I knew it had to have the word 'four' in it, and that it would have to be ascending. And it had to have some kind of explosion. I merged the three notions with Craig Turner, the synthesist, and I think it worked, although it certainly *isn't* what I'd do today."

The Human Torch's flame-on and flying was accomplished, quite simply, with a blow-torch. The

THE FANTASTIC FOUR!! HAH! LITTLE DO THEY DREAM THEY ARE NAUGHT BUT PAWNS IN THE HANDS OF DOCTOR DOOM!
PART 1
STAN LEE
J. KIRBY
DEMONS
SCIENCE AND SORCERY

Art: Jack Kirby/Joe Sinnott

**One actor—Jerry Terheyden—played all the villains.**

Album Cover Art: William Kahns

# The Marvel Comics Radio Series

**The series was serviced to client stations in record form. Each LP bore the Marvel Radio brand.**

synthesizer suggested Sue Storm's invisibility and Reed Richards' stretching-powers. "We wound up dumping stones in bags, and then walking them across the floor to give Ben Grimm rock-feet," he laughs.

Describing the fight scene was a weekly headache. "The *real stars* of Marvel Comics are the *artists*. not the writers, and that's what they're best at doing," says Lewis. "It might not have been a smart idea to take these very powerful visuals and convert them into sound. These monsters and villains were hard enough to re-create for sound, and now looking back, I'm not sure we did such a good job.

"I saw that we were in quicksand with *The Fantastic Four*, so we might have done four more episodes before we leap-frogged over to *The Incredible Hulk* or *The Silver Surfer*. Those were two that I thought would be quick hits, and doing sounds for those characters wouldn't require re-inventing the wheel each time. I also thought that people would probably respond to them even more than *The Fantastic Four*."

The Incredible Hulk carried over well on radio, thanks to Jerry Terheyden's ability to play both Dr. Banner and his Gamma-powered alter-ego—although there were a few problems when Bob Maxwell had to play both Reed Richards *and* Rick Jones, characters who had numerous conversations in "The Fantastic Four Meet the Incredible Hulk." In "The Horrible Harrassment of the Hate-Monger," Terheyden also played Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., so well that a radio series should have been given to *that* character.

According to Lewis, had the program continued, that *might* have happened. "*The Marvel Comics Radio Series* was meant to be an umbrella for *all* of the Marvel line-up," he says. "We had the rights to 10 other characters; I don't remember which ones.

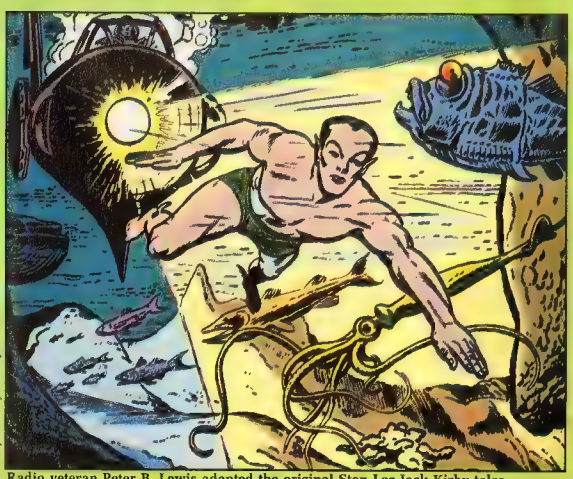
Lewis Photo By & Copyright Joel Polsky

**Peter B. Lewis produced the Fantastic Four's radio adventures.**

"I started working on the next 13 weeks, but I hadn't planned which storylines we were going to do. I was so exhausted when we finished the first 65 episodes—not just from the work, but the harrassment surrounding the money—that I never bothered to make any long-term plans."

Art: Jack Kirby/Art Simek

**Stan Lee narrated the series, sometimes struggling through his own words.**



Art: Jack Kirby/Dick Ayers

**Radio veteran Peter B. Lewis adapted the original Stan Lee-Jack Kirby tales featuring such characters as the Red Ghost, Rama Tut and the Sub-Mariner.**

*The Marvel Comics Radio Series* suffered the same difficulties that victimized radio comedy and drama two decades earlier. Television had stolen most of the audiences, and the radio station listings on the Bullpen Bulletins page (which ran in all Marvel Comics) were barely noticed. There was no national advertiser, which crippled the show financially—a commercial selling Fantastic Four T-shirts didn't

*(continued on page 73)*

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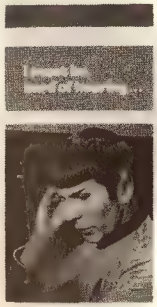

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## Batman

*(continued from page 44)*

one set of notions about his identity that were completely eradicated overnight. In a very real way, he hasn't had time to find himself. We'll see if we can explore that theme in terms of action and melodrama and swashbuckling, all of which we still respond to."

All of O'Neil's free time over the past few months has been taken up with writing the *Knightfall* prose novel, which he says has proven grueling. "I come home from work every night, have dinner, and then go back and type until I can't type anymore," he says. "I've never worked under pressure like this, because the book is already being advertised! I feel like all of these people are looking at me, and I don't dare blow this thing—but had I known how it was going to take over my life..."

The novel, to be published shortly by Bantam, will include much that could not be squeezed into the comic books. "There is lots and lots of stuff like that," he says. "It has been difficult, but also the most educational thing I've ever tried. I now know from the inside out what the differences between the media are, and it has given me a better understanding of how comics work. It has certainly given me a far better understanding of what writing a novel entails; it's not my first one, but it's certainly my longest and most difficult."

Denny O'Neil has had a long career in comics, both as an editor and a scripter, but says he still finds challenges. "*Azrael* is going to challenge me. Certainly, the 'KnightsEnd' stuff we're just concluding has been very, very difficult. There have been times when my assistants and I have worked virtually around the clock, but it looks to me like we've brought it off.

"Five years ago, I figured out that I am a storyteller. It's something I've been doing since I was seven years old. You can lose sight of that fact, but if you boil it down to essentials, it's storytelling. Mike Carlin and I have been given the opportunity to do vastly complicated stories with characters that are probably recognizable to 90 percent of the people on the planet, and it's being done in a radio format, as well as the comics series and a novel. It's an incredible opportunity, something that I don't think *any* other storyteller in history has had a chance to do.

"But, I would like not to be quite as challenged in the next year. After this all dies down, I think I'll find a mountain cabin somewhere for a couple of weeks, and just sit and stare at the clouds."

## Archie

*(continued from page 48)*

turned into an all-new bi-monthly comic book that Lash and wife Jackie Estrada are self-publishing, with the first issue out now.

"Comic books were what I *always* wanted to do," he says. "The comic strip was just a means to an end, but as time went on, I just felt more and more restricted. *The Punisher Meets Archie* is allowing me to finance my own comic book!"

Each company hopes that *The Punisher Meets Archie* will garner more readers for both by presenting the characters to each other's fans. "Obviously, the main plan is to get people who wouldn't pick up *Archie* to check it out, because I think the reason Archie went into this was to get Marvel fans to pay attention to Archie," he says. "My goal was to have people who hate the Punisher, who would *never* have anything to do with anything related to the Punisher, buy this and read it and say, 'He's not bad.' That's my goal."

Nearly every comic, particularly odd titles like *The Punisher Meets Archie*, get negative comments when they are announced, but Lash says he has heard no disparaging words. "I was really, really shocked by the *positive* response," he notes. "Marvel and Archie announced this at a New York convention, and when I went back into the dealers' room, I was wearing one of the Archie/Punisher pins. People were saying, 'Did you hear about that?!' I was shocked.

"A former managing editor of the *Comics Journal* had heard of it but didn't know I was working on it. When I ran into her weeks later, she saw my wife wearing the pin, and she went nuts. When she heard Archie was going to meet the Punisher, she laughed hysterically and said, *'I never* buy mainstream comics, but I'm getting that! It's the greatest thing I have ever heard!' That's when it dawned on me that this is so ridiculous that it's cool! Maybe we *are* on top of something. The response has been very good, and I just hope the story delivers!"

The writer himself may unintentionally deliver the strongest endorsement of *The Punisher Meets Archie*, which could truly be the "strangest team-up of all."

"I found myself having tremendous fun with this, and believe it or not, I even wound up liking the Punisher!" laughs Batton Lash. "I have a tendency to get emotionally involved with whatever I'm writing, and I was beginning to take on a paternal attitude toward the Punisher. It was very odd!"

## Gibson

*(continued from page 10)*

the Holmes books. The only time I've seen any consistency is where the actual writer may have done both. If they do a movie that comes within range of the Victor Jory serial, that would be good."

The casting of his hero is one question Gibson didn't take seriously. "It calls for an active actor who has to be a daredevil crimefighter," he mused. "Then, as The Shadow's alter-ego, Lamont Cranston, the actor has to play an urbane socialite at ease with both royalty and the rich. There is only one actor I can think of who fits that description to perfection—but Ronald Reagan won't be available until 1988!"

Gibson laughed heartily at his own joke. But underneath, he was concerned about the endless delays. "I just wish they would get this damn movie made," he said. "At my age, I can't make plans very far in advance."

His words proved sadly prophetic. It took eight more years for the film to go before the cameras. Ronald Reagan *was* available, but of course, the role went to Alec Baldwin, now known for *Beetlejuice* and *The Hunt For Red October* but, in 1985, seen only on TV's *Knots Landing* (and probably an actor therefore unknown to Gibson). The delays prevented Gibson from fulfilling his heartfelt wish for a cameo in the Shadow film. He felt it would be a nice touch if Lamont Cranston were to point out the famous writer, Walter B. Gibson, to Margo Lane in a scene set in the legendary Cobalt Club.

Anticipating a major Shadow revial, Gibson began planning additional novels starring the Master of Darkness, including one featuring a new supervillain called *Fer-De-Lance*. "It's the only known snake that would turn on its enemy," he explained.

A fifth Shadow vs. Shiwan Khan rematch novel was discovered unfinished in Gibson's typewriter at the time of his passing.

Looking back on his long career as the creator of the greatest pulp hero of all time, and the one who became the symbol of radio drama at its best, Gibson confessed that he never quite understood how so many good things came out of one casual visit to the Street & Smith offices back in 1930.

"I don't know how the Shadow managed to capture the imagination of hundreds of readers and millions of radio listeners," Walter Gibson said. "But he did. And for that I am grateful. In those hard times, The Shadow kept me in cars and 'luxuries.' For it was the days of the Depression and I was a hungry young writer, as writers have always been."

# FF Radio

*(continued from page 70)*

help either.

"It's hard to sit down and figure out why it didn't work," Lewis says, " 'cause I only heard it in Seattle. At the station where it played in my town, they loved it. They thought it was the coolest thing they ever heard—but maybe that's because they were talking to me directly. The radio stations running the show all seemed pretty enthusiastic about it. There was a lot of sadness when there weren't another 65 episodes to do."

The same problem befell another series that Lewis engineered years later, called *Roger Fayes, Certified Public Accountant*, "which was a disaster. The producer actually went out and *sold his car* to fund the project! I told him not to do that, to get other people's money. I saw him two years ago. He writes games for Nintendo now, and he does pretty well at it. *Never* use your own money."

Lewis learned that lesson well after the demise of *The Marvel Comics Radio Series*, which cost a staggering $47,000 to produce, and generated only $22,000 in revenue. He is now the president of Audisee Productions and the major stockholder of the Better Sound All Around Corporation, a Seattle-based sound and video company.

"We've won tons of awards for producing commercials. I design soundtracks and playback systems for huge trade shows and retail stores. I also do soundtracks for video-walls. It's a different world here in the '90s.

"At this point in my life, I would love to do another radio series. Radio has always been my love, but the problem is that there isn't *any* money or interest in it."

And he thinks that anyone inclined to do another Marvel radio program would be better off starting from scratch.

"We had very limited toys in those days," says Peter B. Lewis, "and we just didn't have much electronic equipment to mess around with. The stuff now is so much more sophisticated than what was available in 1975.

"Don't misunderstand me—I would love to see *The Fantastic Four* get back into syndication, or be re-released in any form. Thousands of Marvel fans would really get off on hearing this stuff. And I would love to do *properly-funded* radio programs again. It's enjoyable, it's meaningful, and it touches a segment of the audience that the things I'm doing now just don't touch." CS

# Wetworks

*(continued from page 40)*

not creating masterpieces to be studied in art classes 100 years from now. It's a commercial industry, meaning we do work for the buyers out there—kids, mostly. If they're going to buy it and keep reading, it has to be something they want. The major difference here is, no one's sending down word from on-high about how to do things."

What's also great is that Image employs his friend and studio-mate Jim Lee (CS #30) among its legion of fan-favorite comics creators. Sharing a studio with other top-notch artists is a huge benefit in Portacio's eyes.

"We challenge each other," he says. "Everything we can do, we believe in doing well, given the kind of tight deadlines we have. When Homage [Studios, his company] started out, we found out a book we were doing was already behind schedule; we ended up doing the whole thing, from pencils through colors, in nine days. Collaboration-wise, things like that bring out our best—we don't sit around thinking; we just plowed through it and bang!"

When Portacio first entered the comics industry, he thought it was very centralized. He says that the reality of comics creation is one of the worst aspects of the business.

"Everyone is a freelancer," he says. "Everyone lives everywhere. On one book, we had a writer in Illinois, a letterer in New Jersey, a colorist I don't know where and an inker in San Diego. You can work with someone six months or a year and he's only a voice on the phone, nothing more. I've gone up to Los Angeles once or twice, met Steve Gerber and Frank Miller. It's fantastic meeting those guys, but I can't see them just to shoot the breeze about the work. It almost has to be on the phone or not at all.

"The problem with working that way is that I have very little access to other writers. Even when you get to meet someone, you both have your own schedules to maintain. The only people I can really bounce ideas off of and get a reaction from are the guys in the studio. We're willing to ask each other, 'Does this work?' and say if it doesn't, and give reasons why. It has helped all of us grow, and I hope more studios form in the future, because I know firsthand how helpful they are."

Although *Wetworks* has experienced significant delays en route to publication, the miniseries will definitely hit comics stores on a monthly basis, this July, August and September.

Meanwhile, Portacio has joined Jim Lee's Wildstorm Productions as a creative director, delegating to Lee's Aegis Entertainment the handling of all *Wetworks* merchandising, licensing and sales. Portacio is relieved to be rid of those business tasks, thus allowing him to concentrate on what he likes most about comics: actually creating them.

Portacio's philosophy is simple. "I believe," he says, "if an artist follows his instincts, he'll do his best work; any artist, be he a writer, penciller, singer, actor. It's a piece of yourself, and it comes from the heart. That's the idea: To touch somebody."

Portacio consciously tries to avoid drawing like other artists. "There are artists of all types who come into the field trying to be somebody else," he says. "If you try to copy a successful artist, you end up exaggerating their mistakes. I've got mistakes, bunches of them, but I try not to pick up somebody else's on top of them. It's a hard dilemma to do what you feel is right, and then remember what you did to make that happen in the first place.

"It's like being a film director. His job is making an audience react the right way at the right time; to cry, to laugh, to feel. You make them respond, but you don't always know why they did, and you have to keep trying to recapture that success. So, you put in your own personal things and hope they work."

Describing his work as akin to film direction is a natural metaphor for Whilce Portacio: He hopes to eventually become a film director. To that end, he cherishes the notion that *Wetworks* could move to the screen.

"We're very consciously keeping the art within the technical limits of what can be done in film today," he says. "I'm treating everything as though it were a high-budget science-fiction movie, because I would like to make it someday. I like to think this series could go to the big screen. It has more than enough action and adventure!" CS

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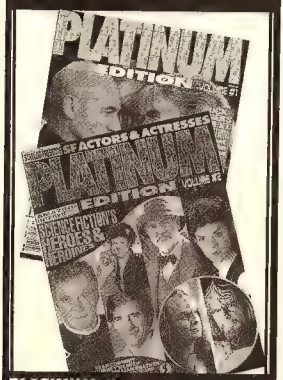


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# VanderPyl

*(continued from page 24)*

than just a full-length cartoon. It marks the end of an era. Shortly after taping, George O'Hanlon died. "He passed away on the movie set," VanderPyl somberly says. "I went back in for pickups and rejects, and as I drove in the parking lot, he was being taken away in an ambulance. George was in doing pickups when he had a stroke. He went to the hospital and didn't live the day out. Right before that, at the end of the last *Jetsons* series, we lost Daws Butler. I'm almost superstitious about doing any more *Jetsons*. Who is going to go next?" Soon after *Jetsons: The Movie* was finished, Mel Blanc (Mr. Spacely, see page 26 this issue) died.

Although she still does some voice work, most recently resurrecting Winnie Witch for the *Fender Bender 500* segment of Hanna-Barbera's new morning program, *Wake, Rattle & Roll*, she is semi-retired. "I am walking with a cane these days." she sighs. "I'm on Social Security and a pension. Once in a while, I work when they have something." Surprisingly, after so many years of doing voice work, VanderPyl's residual income leaves much to be desired.

"I would be a wealthy lady if I had gotten residuals from *The Flintstones* all these years. What happened...in the '60s, even our own union [Screen Actors Guild] didn't realize that any TV show would play more than six runs. *The Flintstones* and *I Love Lucy* taught our union, and everyone else, that these things can go on *forever*.

"We *should* get residuals, but we don't. Even when you do get them, it drops so far. I got a bunch of back residuals a couple of weeks ago, for a year or so of shows, like 42 checks at once, for $19, $13.80, like that."

For her many fans, there is a slew of VanderPyl's work available on TV or in video stores. Her numerous characters appear in hundreds of Hanna-Barbera cartoons, including *Atom Ant*, *Hong Kong Fooey*, *Quick Draw McGraw*, *Tom & Jerry*, *Popeye*, *Magilla Gorilla* (VanderPyl played Magilla's friend, Ogee. "She always went around saying, 'Oh, gee!' so they called her Ogee."), and *The Flintstone Kids* (as Wilma's *mother*).

For the diehard admirer, some of her live action work pops up occasionally on replays of *Murder, She Wrote*, *Hardcastle & McCormick* and as Gladys Frisbee, the town biddy on *Petticoat Junction*.

Watching a slow moving train pass between her window and the ocean, Jean VanderPyl smiles thoughtfully. "What I really wish, is that they would revive *The Flintstones*!"

# Bone

*(continued from page 53)*

"I've found that, when you're writing something silly—like a cow race, for instance—you have to take it seriously, and the characters do, too. Somehow, that makes it more funny. No matter how stupid what they're doing is, my characters *have* to take what they're doing seriously.

"When I'm writing this series, I picture it in my head, just like it's a movie. So, say I'm writing this Cow Race. I know I need to start the race, so I'll picture the starting line. All these cows lined up at the starting line. Then, 'Ready. Set. Go!' I see this line of cows, Gran'ma Ben coming toward the camera, *rumble rumble rumble*. I actually see it move.

"Then, I realize I have to move Gran'ma Ben through this crowd of cows, as she notices Smiley Bone dressed in a cow costume. [Phoney Bone has had his cousin dress as a cow and has entered him in the race as "the mystery cow," all part of Phoney's plot to make a killing betting on the cow race.] So, I back things up and start things over—the starting line, ready set go!, *rumble rumble rumble*. Then, I picture Gran'ma Ben moving through the crowd, *rumble rumble rumble*, trying to get a line on this mystery cow. Many times, the jokes will work out as I'm picturing things in my head. I think, 'Yeah, I could make him fall right there, that would be funny.' That's the most fun, when I'm actually writing the story."

Smith says, "Now that the Cow Race and those hijinks are out of the way, I'll be getting back to my storyline, and moving on to what is, in a sense, my next little story. The Cow Race leaves Phoney Bone wiped out, and he becomes indentured to Gran'ma Ben. That will serve to keep the Bone cousins in the valley, instead of heading back to Boneville, which is where they thought they were going [after the Cow Race]. They'll have to rebuild Gran'ma Ben's cabin [destroyed in *Bone* #5 when the rat creatures attacked Gran'ma Ben, Fone Bone and Thorn] and that will serve as the arc to the cousins' next adventure. As they're working on the cabin, I'll be able to have some interplay between the characters, have them get into some discussions, that sort of thing.

"The economy of the valley is based on dairy and poultry products. I may have Phoney Bone, for instance, with two chickens, trying to convince them to lay more eggs. I can picture him," says Jeff Smith, planning for the future, "setting these two chickens down to supper at a table—wining and dining them as he 'hatches' his next get-rich scheme."

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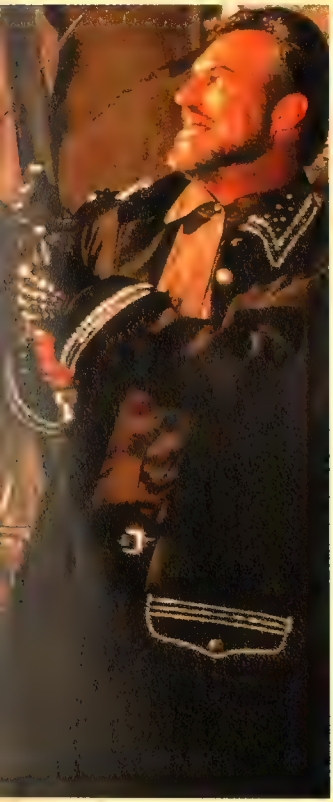
# BATMAN BADDIES

***When they fight the Dark Knight, Catwoman & Two-Face really get animated.***



Richard Moll is the voice behind both faces of Harvey Dent, a.k.a. Two-Face, one of the Dark Knight's arch-nemeses on *Batman: The Animated Series.*

Highlander Photo: Ken Staniforth/Rysher Entertainment

All Batman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 DC Comics Inc.

Design & Layout: Vera Naughton

## Split Personalities

There are two sides to every story—and many sides to every actor. For example, take Richard Moll, whose face is best known to mainstream audiences as the bald bailiff Bull in the sitcom hit *Night Court.* But *Batman* fans and animation buffs know his voice best.

In the animated *Batman* series, Moll does assorted voices—including "a computer, a thug, a guard" and other small roles—but he was hired principally to provide the voice of district attorney Harvey Dent, a.k.a. Batman's arch-villain Two-Face.

Explains Moll of his character, "Dent gets acid spilled on his face and turns into this really horrendous character who says things like [menacing, breathy voice] 'Forget the kid; it's Batman I want.' He has this low, growling voice. I guess some of the acid got on his vocal chords. He has a split personality, because half of his face is still the handsome Harvey Dent. The other half is all messed up."

Reportedly, Moll's audition was so eerily effective that the entire *Batman* production staff stopped dead in their tracks upon hearing it. "Really? How cool," Moll enthuses. "I'm glad to hear it. Mission accomplished.

"I've done a lot of voiceover auditions, and it's tough to get in," he continues. "So, it was a delight to get something like *Batman.* When I first came in, they wanted more of a Marlon Brando kind of thing [he imitates what sounds like a slowly-dying Brando], so I did that. Then, when I started to read on the first episode, I was trying that, but it wasn't quite happening. So, I went into the voice I used for the sorcerer Xusia in *The Sword and the Sorcerer* [breathy, growling voice]: 'Why do you have need of me? You are a king with an army.' The producers said, 'That's it. Stick with that,' so *that* became the voice."

Moll (who discussed his career in STARLOG #188) takes a straightforward approach to character acting. "You just try to think the thoughts of the character and imagine the situation he's in," he remarks. "And perhaps substitute people you don't really like for the people you're talking to! You just get as nasty as you possibly can. You bring out your worst self and just go for it."

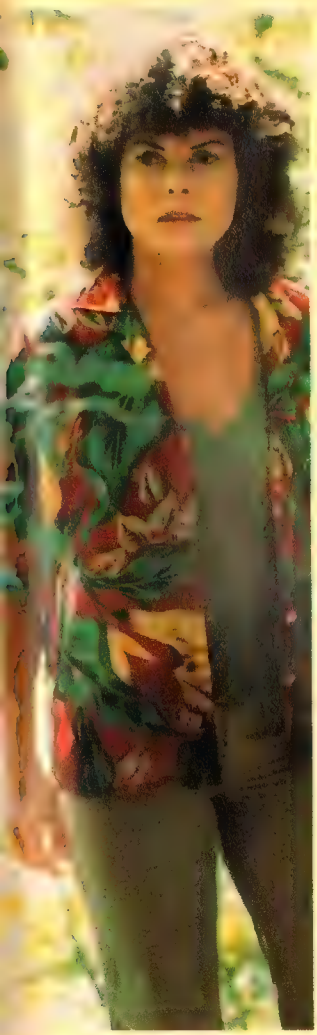
In Moll's opinion, the animated *Batman* "has much to offer that's special. The graphics are quite extraordinary—it has the look of a well-drawn comic book. I come in to do looping and I see the actual animation. It's quite impressive visually; it's almost like cartoons by Rembrandt. The stories are very interesting, too; it's sort of an adult cartoon. They go pretty deep: They deal with tragedy and sickness and all kinds of strange things. It's *not* Tom and Jerry, let's put it that way."

*—Kyle Counts*

# Cat's Meow

For Adrienne Barbeau, best known for her roles in *Swamp Thing* and *Maude*, her real-life role as a mother indirectly led to a career as a cartoon Catwoman.

"When I had a child, I decided to only choose things I could do that wouldn't take me away from him for any length of time," she says. "At that point, I started doing voice-overs and radio commercials, and I was hired to do the voice of Catwoman in *Batman: The Animated Series*."



Barbeau (profiled in STARLOG #49) says her association with *Batman* began normally. "I just went in and auditioned," she says. "I got the call, and I went to the agency and picked up the copy there. In fact, it usually takes longer to drive to the agency than it does to do an audition! The *Batman* audition involved going to Warner Bros. They had three little paragraphs that had been written for Catwoman. I just stood in front of a microphone and read them off once each, and they spent weeks listening to voices and narrowing it down."

The actress admits she did her voice performances before she was aware of the Catwoman's appearance. "I was quite surprised when I finally saw her!" Barbeau laughs. "I didn't expect her to be blonde, and I didn't expect her to have such a huge butt! But when I do the voice, I'm not thinking about what she looks like. It's an acting job, so I'm thinking how I feel about what I'm saying, who I'm talking to and what that character's doing. We read it through once, and the director [Andrea Romano, voice director], who has the benefit of the animation in front of her, will tell me, 'That sound is her jumping off the roof,' or 'She just got kicked in the stomach.' As I do it, I'll do the, 'Ooof,' and she'll say, 'OK, I need a little bit more,' or 'Drag it out more,' or 'No, she wasn't kicked in the stomach, she fell on her back.'

"That has been fun. I love doing Catwoman—unfortunately, there were so many villains in the series that none of us did too many episodes," says Barbeau. "But animation is great, because you don't have to put on makeup, you don't have to get dressed, you can do the whole thing in an hour and you're working with fun people! None of my jobs feel like jobs—I don't feel as though I've ever worked a day in my life. It has always been a pleasure!"

—*Kim Howard Johnson*

**"I didn't expect her to be blonde, and I didn't expect her to have such a big butt!" exclaims Adrienne Barbeau of her alter-ego, Selina Kyle/Catwoman.**

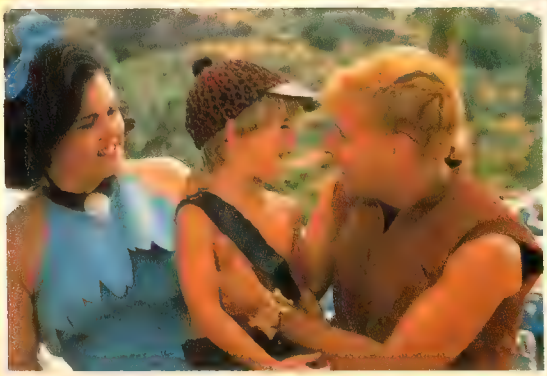
Batman Art: Courtesy Warner Bros.

# PREHISTORIC

***The Flintstones, that stone age family & friends, offer a very realistic look at cartoon life past.***

It's another typical day in Bedrock. Mrs. Wilma Flintstone (Elizabeth Perkins) cooks up a larger-than-average omelette for her larger-than-average husband.

Design & Layout: Vera Naughton



Ahh...a chip off the old rock. Barney (Rick Moranis) and Betty Rubble (Rosie O'Donnell) lavish a whole lotta love on little Bam-Bam.

# POSTCARDS

Everybody smile for the camera. It's amazing how much some people look just like their appliances.

When she's good, she's good, but when she's bad she's *better*. Fred's prehistoric yuppie boss (Kyle MacLachlan) gets a stroke of genius when he rubs his Rosetta Stone (Halle Berry).

All Flintstones Photos: Ron Batzdorff

All Flintstones Photos: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Universal City Studios & Amblin Entertainment

Deviled pterodactyl eggs are all the rage in Downtown Bedrock. Everybody is trying to keep up with the Rubbles.

Some people are good test takers, and others, like common man-about-town Fred Flintstone, are not.

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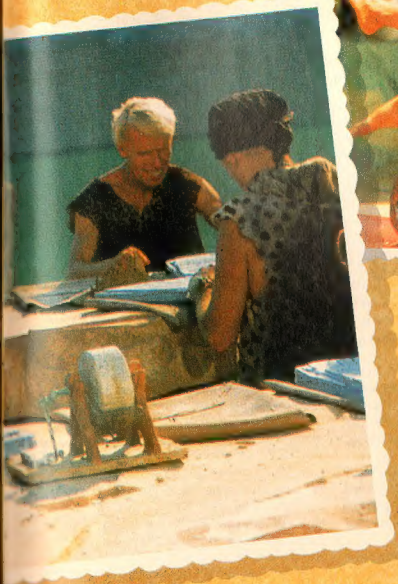
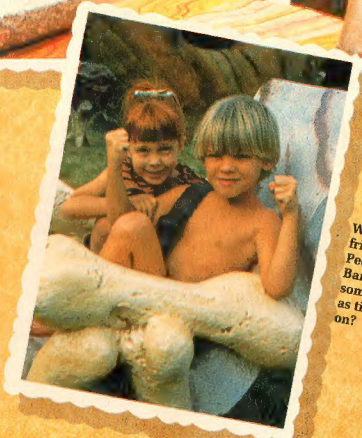
When a caveman loves a woman...





Will the childhood friendship of Pebbles and Bam-Bam grow into something...serious as time marches on?

# Blanc

*(continued from page 30)*

Blanc remembered. "What they had were stock characters, who were on salary so they didn't have to pay them anything. One of them drove the animators crazy, 'cause he stuttered and would use up all the film."

When the executive who wouldn't let Blanc through the door died soon after, cartoon producer Leon W. Schlesinger gave the young actor a break. Blanc's first voice—a drunken, inarticulate bull—won him a permanent job. Soon, he was doing Porky.

Blanc's next major break turned out to be a blessing in disguise. "I went to Schlesinger and asked for a raise, and I swear, he said, 'Why do you want to make more money? You'll just have to pay more taxes.'

"I said, 'Well, how about giving me screen credit?' He said, 'Screen credit? For a voice? Who ever heard of that?' " Schlesinger finally agreed to the by-now familiar line, "Voice characterizations by Mel Blanc," the first time *any* voice artist was credited in a cartoon.

**Even the fastest mouse in all Mexico, Speedy Gonzalez, got the gift of gab from Blanc.**

Suddenly, Blanc—who had been receiving $200 a week from Warner Bros.—was flooded with offers for guest spots on radio shows. "They hadn't realized it was me doing the cartoons. So, they would call me in to do little spots and pay $250 for each. That was nothing for them."

Without question, Blanc's favorite peer and collaborator was Jack Benny, an idol of Blanc's youth whom he described as "a wonderful, generous man, with fabulous comic timing."

It became an in-joke among Benny's writers to come up with a voice that Blanc couldn't do. In addition to the Mexican Sy, Professor Le Blanc (Benny's tortured violin teacher), the train track announcer (known for exclaiming, "Anaheim, Azusa and Cuc-a-monga") and others, Blanc also did Benny's Maxwell (a sputtering, faltering car that gasped as if it were on its last wheels), the polar bear who guarded Benny's secret bank vault and an English horse at Churchill Downs.

"I would never say no," Blanc said wryly. Once, the writers listed in the script, "Mel Blanc does a goldfish." In rehearsals, Blanc walked to the microphone and made goldfish faces, but no sound at all.

Blanc would later use his Maxwell voice for Chug-a-Boom, the Ant Hill Mob's car in *The Wacky Races* and *The Perils of Penelope Pitstop* and for Speed Buggy.

When Benny's show went from radio to TV, Blanc feared he would be left behind. "But Jack always found something for me to do," he said. "There would always be a spot on the TV show for me."

Working with Abbott & Costello was far less enjoyable, as the brilliant comic duo had a tumultuous off-screen relationship. "They *hated* each other," Blanc admitted. "Especially Lou Costello. He kept trying to get other men to do Abbott's part, and he could never find one. But Abbott was just the best straight man around."

Though he worked alone when voicing cartoons, Blanc never missed playing off other actors. In the early days at Warner Bros., however, Blanc would record a six-minute cartoon straight through—what animators called "continuity form."

"That was terrible," Blanc noted. "If someone made a mistake, you would have to go back and do the whole thing over again. It took a day-and-a-half to do one cartoon.

"Finally, I went to Friz Freleng and suggested I do each voice individually all the way through, then have the technicians put it together. That was much quicker, and it saved Warner Bros. thousands of dollars."

The splicing technique freed Blanc to do more freelancing and radio work. He was also doing the voice for Woody Woodpecker, one of his favorites. So, why did he stop voicing this other crazy bird?

"Because Warner Bros. made me a better offer," he admitted. "They said they wanted to give me enough money that I wouldn't need to do cartoons for anybody else."

Woody's creator, Walter Lantz, looked long and hard for a replacement who could do the famed Woodpecker's laugh and ended up with his wife, Gracie, who voiced the character for more than 40 years. "Walter finally found a girl who could come close to the voice, and he didn't want to lose her, so he *married* her," Blanc quipped.

Moving out of the animation field, Blanc also created the voice for Twiki, Buck Rogers' possessive robot companion on the TV series. Originally, he reveals, the producers of *Buck Rogers* wanted Twiki to remain incapable of speech and make only gurgling noises.

"They went for the sound, and I threw in [*in Twiki's voice*], 'Buck, you're my kind of guy.' They really liked that and decided to use it."

Writing, he suggested, was not one of that SF-TV show's strengths—a problem that plagues modern cartoons as well. He is particularly offended by charges of excessive violence leveled against Warner Bros. cartoons in recent years. "Compared to today, there is *no* 'violence' in any cartoon I've ever made," Blanc maintained. "Friz Freleng wouldn't allow it.

"Yes, Wile E. Coyote will fall off an 8,000-foot cliff, and it looks like he has been killed 1,000 times over. But in the next scene, he's up and chasing the Road Runner.

"It's just slapstick comedy, and kids understand that. No kid is going to jump off an 8,000-foot cliff because of a cartoon."

Blanc loved his work, but he did admit to some regrets. He wanted to do more film work, "but never had the time." *Neptune's Daughter*, a soggy comedy starring Red Skelton and Esther Williams, was the beginning and end of his movie career.

His writing aspirations were also put aside as the demand for his vocal talents blossomed. Blanc wrote one cartoon for Warner Bros.—"just to keep myself working," he said—that turned out to be the first of the many travelogue spoofs.

Blanc achieved all the recognition he could have ever wanted. He saw it in the faces of college students as he toured across the country—knowing, in most cases, that their parents grew up listening to his voices as well.

His favorite memory from his college appearances involved his regular question-and-answer sessions. At one, a youth asked him what was the *first* voice he had ever done. After a long pause, Blanc simply raised the microphone and let out a baby's cry.

"That got such a big laugh, I plant somebody now to ask me that in case nobody else does," he chuckled.

The other frequently asked question, of course, is "What's up, Mel?" Looking back on his long career as the voice behind America's favorite menagerie, Mel Blanc could only smile and say, "Things are just fine, Doc."

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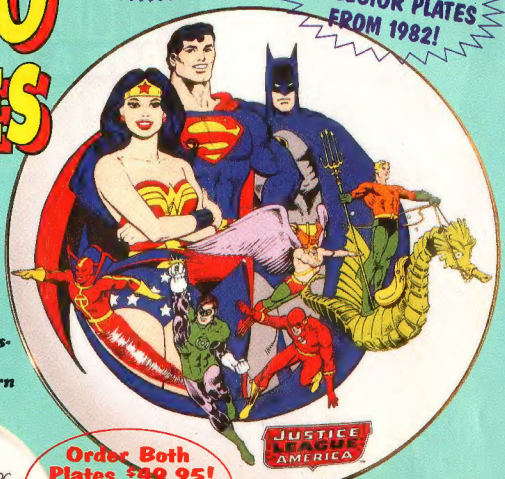


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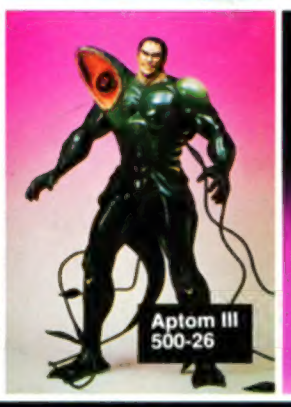

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